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CONFLICT

Angora to Afghanistan

By

ROSITA FORBES

With a Foreword by

BRIGADIER-GENERAL

SIR PERCY SYKES

K.C.I.E., C.B., C.M.G.

WITH 48 HALF-TONE PLATES

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AND

H.E. THE PRESIDENT

OF THE TURKISH REPUBLIC

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I AM greatly indebted to Sir Percy Sykes, whose name is still a power in the Middle East, not only for his Foreword, but for the continual assistance afforded me by his famous "History of Persia." My warmest thanks are due to Sir John Cadman, Mr. Jacks and Mr. Elkington, for the generous hospitality extended to me throughout the Oil-fields, as well as to Sir Henry Norman for suggestions and to Sir Denison Ross, for introductions which were of the greatest service. I would also express my gratitude to H. H. Teymourtache, Court Minister to H. M. the Shah; to Sir George Clerk, H. B. M's Ambassador to Turkey, and to Sir Robert Clive, H. B. M's Minister to Persia, by whose knowledge and experience I greatly benefited; and to many others whose hospitality I enjoyed, and who provided me with much interesting and useful information, especially Mr. Wishaw, and Ezaz ed Dowleh at Isfahan, the British Consuls at Shiraz, Kerman, Dusdap and Meshed, Mr. and Mrs. Binns, and Mr. Vahé Ardsroony at Tabriz, Mustafa Khan Fatteh at Tehran, the Khan Bahadur Abul Qassem el Moani at Yezd, and the missionaries, whether British or American, throughout the country. In conclusion, I would like to thank all those who kindly allowed me to reproduce their photographs in this book, including Mr. Pitt (110), *M. Sevriyugin of Tehran* (96, 112, 114, 116, 160, 172).

FOREWORD

By Brigadier-General SIR PERCY SYKES

K.C.I.E., C.B., C.M.G.

THE defeat of Turkey in the Great War has brought about considerable territorial changes in the Near and Middle East. Turkey herself, shrunk to her ancient home in Asia Minor, with little left in Europe apart from Constantinople and Thrace, still marches with Persia, her hereditary foe, whose boundaries the Great War has not affected. Farther east lies the erstwhile hermit kingdom of Afghanistan with its equally unchanged boundaries. To the south, Arabia is now generally dominated by the capable Ibn Saud, although the *Imam* of Sanaa still rules his primitive and fanatical subjects. Between these independent states are situated Palestine with Trans-Jordan, Iraq and Syria, former provinces of Turkey, whose destinies have been shaped by Great Britain and France respectively, acting as Mandatory Powers. The decade that has just ended will, I am convinced, prove to be of supreme importance to these countries and, in this foreword, I propose to analyse the position and the evolution of the three northern independent states.

To commence our survey with Turkey, it seemed as if she must collapse under the crushing blows inflicted on her armies in the Caucasus, in Palestine and in Iraq, not forgetting the heavy losses she suffered at the Dardanelles. But, thanks mainly to the genius of Mustafa Kemal, Turkey repulsed the Greek army that might well have administered the *coup de grâce* and, by the Treaty of Lausanne, negotiated in 1923, obtained unexpectedly good terms.

Mustafa Kemal has expelled the Greek population from Asia Minor and has taken in exchange some thousands of Moslem families from Europe. The section of the unfor-

tunate Armenian nation, that inhabited Turkey-in-Asia had already been massacred and consequently, after the transfers of population had been effected, Turkey-in-Asia for the first time in her history consisted of a purely Moslem population. Realizing the overwhelming sea-power of the Christian states, the *Ghazi* quitted Constantinople and created a new capital at Angora. Not content with abolishing the Sultanate and establishing a Republic, ruled by a dictator, he committed the error of treating the Caliphate with equal ruthlessness. As regards Europe, his attitude may be described as a passion for westernization, coupled with a grim determination to suffer no European control. One of the outward and visible signs of the new order was the abolition of the fez and the substitution of the European hat, while every effort is being made to induce women to unveil and to take a part in public affairs.

What is the result of this policy to-day? The expulsion of the Greeks has deprived Turkey of her best agriculturalists and men of business, by whose return to their ancient homeland the price of land and the general prosperity have increased, in contra-distinction to Turkey, where land has depreciated in value and where both towns and villages have shrunk. Moreover, the Greeks have taken with them not only their tobacco cuttings but also the carpet-weaving industry, while Constantinople, which possesses the finest commercial site in the world, is a moribund city.

It would be interesting to know exactly what population is left in Turkey to be ruled—and to pay taxes. Turkey had been engaged in war after war during the decade preceding the Great War, which levied a terrible toll of blood on her manhood. Rosita Forbes is sceptical as to the accuracy of the census of 1927, which gave a return of nearly fourteen millions and would prefer nine to ten millions. I am inclined to think that, in view of the long absence of the men from their families, the official figure is excessive; it may have been inflated from patriotic motives.

The chief weakness of Turkey and of her neighbours is a want of financial acumen. Unwillingness to be indebted to Europe for fresh loans is perfectly sound, but the refusal to be

guided by good expert advice proves a distinct lack of ability. The *Ghazi* apparently orders certain measures to be taken, which are probably desirable in themselves, but to make the unfortunate population pay for them out of current revenue, results in the infliction of very heavy taxation on a poor community. Moreover, the abolition of the Caliphate, the adoption of European clothing and the unveiling of women are distasteful to a religious and conservative people. Finally, the campaigns waged against the virile Kurds with a view to their complete "turkification" may be successful by killing them off in large numbers, but it is a policy lacking in true statesmanship. On the Persian side of the frontier the Kurds are dealt with as troublesome tribesmen, but there is no attempt at forcing them into a special Persian mould. After all, the new order is distinctly artificial, depending in all probability on the lives of a handful of clever and determined men, and our author aptly epitomizes the situation in her remark that "outside Angora, the life of Asia is untouched."

Before quitting Turkey, reference must be made to the Treaty of Perpetual Peace that has been negotiated with Persia, but good relations have been sorely strained between the two powers owing to the support given to the Kurds by their fellow-tribesmen on the Persian side of the border. It has, however, been recently arranged that the Persian section of Mount Ararat, which was used as a refuge by the Kurds, should be ceded to Turkey, and it is hoped that, by means of this concession, the good relations between the two powers will no longer be liable to interruption.

We now cross the frontier and enter historical Iran, which, since its foundation in B.C. 550 by Cyrus the Great has enjoyed a national existence of nearly 2,500 years. Persia was fortunate in escaping the very heavy blood tax levied on the belligerent powers. Upon the outbreak of the Great War she declared her neutrality—but was powerless to defend it. The Germans, adopting the policy of Napoleon, determined to attack India across Persia. Their plan was to despatch German Missions into Persia to be followed by a Turkish force. Had this scheme materialized, the arrival of a division

of Sunni Turks at Herat would have forced the Amir to yield to his subjects' fanaticism and thirst for the spoils of India. Such an invasion would have constituted a terrible danger to the British. Actually, in 1915, German Missions overran Central and Southern Persia and driving out the British and Russian colonies, occupied the cities, and acted as advanced bases for Missions to the Amir. In the summer of 1916, after the fall of Kut, the Turks despatched a powerful force, which penetrated Persia as far as Hamadan, driving before it a weaker Russian force, which fell back on a position covering Kazvin.

Had this force been able to reach Tehran it is probable that Persia would have thrown in her lot with our enemies, and it is equally probable that the Afghans would have invaded India.

The action taken by the British was the despatch of a small force under my command, which, in the early summer of 1916, marched into Persia from Bandar Abbas and captured the German Missions. It reached Isfahan in September, and was one of the reasons which the Turks had to consider in the question of an advance on the capital. The fall of Baghdad, in March, 1917, inclined the Persians towards the *Entente*, but the subsequent collapse of Russia swayed them back towards Germany. In the spring of 1918, considering that Germany had won the Great War, the South Persia Rifles, a force which I had raised for the Persian Government and which had been officially acknowledged, was denounced as "a foreign force and a threat to Persian independence and integrity." Owing to this anti-British attitude, the tribes, instigated by Persian Ministers attacked my small force, while detachments of the South Persia Rifles mutinied. The result was that we were invested in Shiraz for some weeks, but finally defeated the enemy, whereupon the Shah changed his policy and his Ministers.

The position in Persia after the Great War was most serious. It seemed as if there would be an entire collapse, in which case the country might have fallen a prey to the Soviet. The situation may be compared with that prevailing in Afghanistan after the Second Afghan War. Just as in Persia,

there was a collapse of the government and the situation was one of unrelieved gloom. In both cases it was saved by the unexpected appearance of two strong men, Abdur Rahman in Afghanistan and Riza Khan in Persia, who transformed the situation and restored peace and order to their respective countries.

Riza, a peasant of Mazanderan by birth, served in the Cossack Division, in which he rose to be a senior officer. In 1921, a Tehran politician suggested a *coup d'état,* whereupon Riza marched his Cossacks on the capital, seized the government and formed a cabinet. At first as Minister of War, then as Premier, he proved his great capacity and finally, after the disappearance off the scene of the weakling Shah, he mounted the throne of Cyrus the Great and was proclaimed Shah Riza Pahlavi. Like his great predecessors, he based his power mainly on his army. Re-enlisting the officers and men of the South Persia Rifles and of the Cossack Division, he organized an army, now estimated to be 60,000 strong, which is better trained and better disciplined than any force commanded by Persian officers in modern times. Incidentally nearly one half of the revenue is devoted to the payment and upkeep of this force. The Shah has restored law and order. He has also re-awakened the national pride. Moreover, following the example of Turkey, he has succeeded in abolishing the Capitulations, by which the subjects of European Powers were tried by their Consuls. In consequence, Europeans in Persia are passing through a very difficult time. A new code has been drawn up, but the Persian judges are ignorant of it, the fact being that judges cannot be made by a resolution of the *Majlis.* To give a single instance, an English doctor recently passed a dead man and a wounded man lying side by side on the road. He succoured the latter and was promptly arrested for murder. Moreover in any dispute between a European and a Persian, the former has very little chance of securing an equitable decision. Indeed, for some years to come, Persian justice will constitute a source of serious irritation to Europeans living in the country.

As already stated, the weak point of these states is finance,

Like Mustafa Kemal, the Shah is unwilling to utilize the services of good European experts. His heart's desire is the construction of a railway from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea, a distance of some twelve hundred miles. The scheme is an eminently laudable one, but Persia possesses neither the money nor the trained administrators nor the personnel for such a vast undertaking, which, if completed, could never pay expenses. If only His Majesty would visit Europe and study the many requirements, the complexity and the cost of a railway service, he might be spared bitter disappointment and loss of prestige. The same remark applies to the creation of a navy in the Persian Gulf. Ships are being constructed in Italy, where Persian youths are being trained, but Persia possesses no dockyard, nor any officials competent to administer even a squadron of small ships, while their cost will constitute an additional burden on a poverty-stricken country.

Finally, Persia somewhat hastily decided to adopt a gold standard and, instead of consulting a financial expert of international eminence, entrusted the task to a foreign legal adviser. Apparently he was given a very short time in which to complete his very complicated task, and the law that he drafted was immediately passed by the *Majlis*, which is entirely obedient to the wishes of the Shah. I fear that His Majesty may have reason to regret his failure to consult competent European advisers before undertaking such serious commitments.

The construction and guarding of roads is of great value to Persia, if only in view of the fact that the motor-car is a great civilizing agency. A generation ago, a Russian company had constructed a road across the Elburz Mountains to Kazvin and Hamadan, and during the Great War, the British constructed a road from the Iraq frontier which was united to it. In the south and east the British also opened up routes on which motors could travel. The Shah has constructed a road across the mountains of Luristan which he guards by the somewhat obsolete method of posts containing a dozen men. In North-West Persia he is also building a road which will unite Azerbaijan with Iraq and, to some extent, give an outlet for

Persian trade, which is so unfairly dealt with by the Soviet. Both these roads our indefatigable traveller has examined and her description is of considerable interest.

I will now turn to the foreign relations of Persia with Great Britain and Russia. With the former Power, as I have already stated, the apparent collapse of Persia after the Armistice was a cause of grave anxiety, and Lord Curzon negotiated an agreement, by the terms of which we supplied a Financial Adviser. We also arranged to organize a Persian army, in which the South Persia Rifles and the Cossack Division would have been amalgamated. The terms of this Agreement were opposed by the large number of vested interests and also by Persian patriots, who hoped that Persia might be able to stand alone. The fortunate appearance of Riza Khan transformed the situation and one of his first acts was to denounce the Agreement and this step was enthusiastically ratified by the *Majlis*. Persians cannot believe that a great Power would not annex Iran, if it had the chance and, in view of the fact that we had troops in the country at the time and that Iraq had been handed over to Great Britain acting as a Mandatory Power, the fear was reasonable. Time has, however, changed this feeling and although the Shah is still undoubtedly unwilling to take any action that would strengthen the British position in Persia, he realizes that we are a friendly and a very tolerant Power.

With Russia the position is more complex. That Power invaded the Caspian provinces in 1920, and only evacuated them because her generals reported that Persia was not suitable for communism, owing to the absence of an industrial population. The Soviet Government, thereupon changed its attitude and, in 1921, negotiated a treaty by the terms of which it surrendered various concessions, including the *Banque d'Escompte*, roads and the Julfa-Tabriz railway. When, however, the question of trade relations was discussed, the peculiar views on commerce held at Moscow produced such friction that an embargo was placed on Persian exports, a measure that caused heavy losses alike to the agriculturist and to the merchant. Under the terms of the present provisional

Agreement, Persian exports are restricted and are paid for by Russian goods, the price of which is fixed by the Bolshevists. This unfair arrangement is bitterly resented in Persia, and it is hoped that the road referred to above may help to redress the present impossible situation. The question of refugees, fleeing from Russia is also an important one which is dealt with in some detail by the author. Altogether the position of Persia, who is being unfairly treated by Russia, must cause the Shah grave anxiety and offers a contrast to the fair dealing of the British Government.

The third state to which this review extends is Afghanistan. During the decade before the Great War, the Amir watched the internal troubles of Persia and even informed the Government of India that, in the case of her collapse, his ancient claims on Khorasan should not be forgotten. Persia, on the other hand, never forgot that Afghanistan had been carved out of Persian provinces and lost no opportunity of treating the Amir or his representatives with scant courtesy. During the Great War, Habibulla Khan, son of grim Abdur Rahman, promised to be loyal in deed, but explained that his speeches might appear to go contrary to his pledge. His position with subjects, who were more than ready to invade India, was one of extreme difficulty, but he played a weak hand with consummate skill. A German Mission, headed by Captain Niedermayer, reached Herat in the summer of 1915. It was courteously received, but, during their stay of some weeks the Germans offended the Afghans by decrying their rifles, which were manufactured at Kabul, and by their haughty attitude. Upon the arrival of the Mission at Kabul, the Amir convened a council of all the tribes and notables. He then engaged in interminable discussions, in which Orientals are past masters. Niedermayer was in despair and even thought of organizing a *coup d'état*. Finally the Mission, which had outstayed its welcome, was dismissed by the Amir who pointed out that, until the promised army appeared on the scene, it would be unwise for him to flout the British. After successfully steering his country through the Great War, Habibulla was assassinated, and his son Amanullah, shortly after ascending the throne,

with inconceivable folly invaded India. This campaign, termed the Third Afghan War, was easily defeated, mainly by the use of artillery, while the moral effect of aeroplanes was considerable. Amanullah sued for peace and was granted such lenient terms that he changed his attitude under the influence of our able representative, Sir Francis Humphreys. In 1929, Amanullah paid a visit to England, where he was treated with such honour and shown such proofs of our power that he returned to Afghanistan fully convinced that it was to his interest to maintain friendly relations with his southern neighbour. His European tour had increased his determination to westernize his unruly subjects and the visits he paid to Mustafa Kemal and to Shah Riza greatly strengthened his resolve. During his absence from Afghanistan rumours had spread that the Queen had not only appeared unveiled and dressed as a European lady, but that her portrait had been published in several newspapers, copies of which were circulated in due course. Consequently Amanullah started his reforms under most unfavourable conditions and neglecting the advice of the Eastern Sages, at a time their support was urgently needed, he left his soldiers unpaid. He was forced to flee for his life, and *Punch,* with unerring acumen, depicted a hairy tribesman frantically stamping on a bowler hat.

His successor realizes the necessity for hastening slowly, but, in view of the turbulent nature of his subjects, he probably agrees with *The Amir's Soliloquy:*

I look from a fort half-ruined, on Kabul spreading below,
On the near hills crowned with cannon, and the far hills piled with snow;
Fair are the vales well watered, and the vines on the upland swell,
You might think you were reigning in Heaven—I know I am ruling Hell.

To summarize, it is interesting to note that, in Turkey, owing to her proximity to Europe and to the affection with which the *Ghazi* is regarded, the European hat and the question of unveiling did not excite much opposition, but the question of the Caliphate and of their religion is undoubtedly troubling the peasantry and if Mustafa Kemal were to disappear off the scene, there would probably be a violent reaction. In Persia, where the personal ascendancy of the Shah is consider-

able, the Pahlavi hat is detested and the unveiling of women is disliked, but Riza has not attempted to abolish the State Religion and has merely curtailed the power and lessened the abuses of the *Mullas*. Yet, as in Turkey, were Shah Riza to disappear from the stage on which he is playing such a fine part, there would be a violent reaction. Finally, in Afghanistan, both European clothing and unveiling are anathema, and there has been a strong reaction in favour of Islam, the old customs and the old abuses. In all three countries the weak point is finance, although Turkey and Afghanistan must envy Persia the handsome revenue which she draws from the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Even so, as Rosita Forbes well puts it, "It is extremely expensive to turn the East into the West and the Pahlavi Government is determined to do it in one generation."

The attitude of Russia to these three states is one of aggression, but, as shown above, the Soviet Government has realized that propaganda can only work successfully among industrial populations, while Moslems are still deeply religious and loathe the tenets of the followers of Anti-Christ. Consequently there is little fear of Moslem conversions to communism while, for reasons given above, it would not pay the Soviet to annex territories which are among the poorest in Asia.

I now bring to a conclusion this foreword, in which I have attempted to create a background for "Conflict," the work of a gallant explorer, who is gifted with deep insight into the mind of the Oriental.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

DURING the course of a journey which took me from Turkey, via Syria, Palestine, Iraq and Persia, to the borders of Afghanistan and back again along the Russian frontier through Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, I looked forward to seeing the effect of a decade of intensive modernization, imposed largely by force, on peoples traditionally conservative.

In every country I found a state of conflict, which included not only the inevitable racial, religious and political disputes, but a more formidable antagonism between the educated and the ignorant; between the free-thinker and the fanatic; between sexes, classes and generations.

Turkey in Asia was involved in what may well be the last act of the long tragedy in which first Armenians and then Kurds were cast for the rôle of victims, and it was obvious that the nationalism of Mustafa Kemal can be as dangerous to the Minorities, whose treatment is a test of civilization, as was the fanaticism of Abdul Hamid.

Syria represented not only the struggle of a dozen mixed races, sects and traditions with France's Napoleonic conception of a Mandate, but the gap between the point of view of Abraham and that of a modern and Levantine Macchiavelli.

Palestine offered a study in consciences, individual and official; as well as in incompatibilities, whether of the immigrant from Central Europe and the local Arab, of political Zion and Biblical Judæa, or of economics and idealism.

Iraq, torn between imperialism and nationalism, was an example of the partial superimposing of several different

and divergent purposes; while the Oil-fields at Khuzistan denoted the opening stages of an industrialization which will raise chimneys instead of minarets throughout a reluctant Asia.

But it was on the Persian plateau that the conflict was most significant. Northwards there was the chaos of Turkestan and the Caucasus, out of which hordes of refugees were continually spilled into Reza Shah's territory. In Afghanistan, the ruler of Herat had reinstituted *Sheria* law—"an eye for an eye"—on the ruins of Amanullah's reforms. Towards Europe, Kurds and Turks were fighting on Mount Ararat, Russians and Armenians on the Aras river, while earthquakes had decimated Azerbaijan. Towards India, Baluchi chiefs were carrying on a profitable trade in slaves and the border merchants an equally remunerative commerce in forged rupee notes, with which it was rumoured the Soviet paid its Sikh and other agents.

In the centre of all this turmoil, Persia was attempting, with considerable success, to enforce in the course of one generation, a social and material evolution which would normally occupy several centuries. The resulting conflict was so dynamic that not only conditions impervious to the growth of a thousand years, but the quality of human nature was in the crucible.

The material gathered on such a journey was of necessity impressionist, for the East is in a state of transition. It hesitates between the superstitions of the Middle Ages and the mechanization of America. The young nationalists are taking Europe in their stride. It is to the States they look for inspiration, commercial and cultural, while the reactionaries, led by whatever happens to be the national church, entrench themselves in the era of miracles and pray that if there must be another dispensation, it may come from no farther off than conservative Europe.

Readers, therefore, who are willing to accompany me

from Angora to Afghanistan, must regard the capital of Turkey as the gate to those unsettled lands where the terms patriot and revolutionary are synonymous, where what we know as civilization means the stifling of the best as well as the worst instincts of primitive races, and where any form of modernization engenders conflict between optimism and suspicion, between an artificially cultivated nationalism and an inherited faith.

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CONFLICT

ANGORA TO AFGHANISTAN

CHAPTER I

THE NEW TURKEY

IN Constantinople, at the various Embassies, I had met elderly Turks who regretted an absolute monarchy dependent on a host of courtiers with the right to make money as they pleased—but were too wise to say so. In Angora, next morning, I met the new Turk, not always young, but nationalist, Kemalist, republican, and, above all things, incurably optimistic

A luxury train, with the usual neatly upholstered blue sleepers, had raced throughout the night across the Anatolian mountains, last barrier between the civilization of Byzantium and the recurring waves of nomads pouring Westward from the Pamirs and the Steppes. Turks, Mongols, Tartars, Huns, had been checked by those mountains. The *train de luxe*, symbol of a more significant conquest creeping Eastward, passes them in a night.

Constantinople had been wrapped in layers of cloud. The mosques, which look like soap bubbles blown out of the Golden Horn, were swaddled so that only the tips of their minarets protruded. But in Asia there was sunshine. The new buildings of Angora looked as if they had all been recently washed and set out in rows for inspection. The air was vastly invigorating. There were splashes of coral blossom bursting out of the desert and a tremendous air of activity. Policemen, omnibuses, taxis, all had the same aspect of well-scrubbed alertness. But under the standards of the wireless station—skeletons of modernity—passed a camel

caravan, bound, at an unchanging two miles an hour, for Samarkand and Central Asia.

From the train, the new town is frankly American. I looked for sky-scrapers on the horizon and found, instead, the citadel which dominates the uncompromising activities of Mustafa Kemal as, years ago, it daunted the warriors of the White Sheep dynasty venturing towards an unknown sea.

No situation could be more suitable, for the old town comprises the whole history of the Turkish tribes. Built by Midas, the Phrygian, it fell to the armies of Zenobia, to Huns, Seljuks, and Crusaders. It saw the defeat and capture of Bayazid—erstwhile conqueror of the Serbians at Kosova and of the chivalry of Europe at Nicopolis—by that veteran of Central Asia, Tamerlane, then in his seventieth year. It was an outpost of Rome and Byzantium. It worshipped Baal and the Hittite gods before Augustus built the temple of Jupiter. Alexander halted in its citadel. Caracalla fortified its walls. To-day it is the background of the new Turkey which builds optimistically, imaginatively, after the fashion of Marshal Lyautey in Morocco.

In the old town there is a mosque whose minarets were once lances, thrust hilt-deep into the earth, the challenge of a fighting faith to Christian Rome and Magian Persia, or tapers which, throughout the Middle Ages, lit the path of a culture advancing from Baghdad.

I saw no mosques in modern Angora. The new town boasts a population of some 60,000, but is prepared to welcome twice, three times, that number. Created by Turkish architects, it spreads out into the desert which gave birth to the first nomad conquerors. Here there are banks, schools, ministries, and barracks, instead of the mosques and palaces of Constantinople. There is a magnificent laboratory, a school of music, an institute of hygiene and of chemical research, a hospital which can, in emergency, provide a thousand beds, the best hotel in the Near East, and high above

THE OLD TOWN AND THE CITADEL AT ANGORA

the great, unfinished avenues, the splendid building devoted to the Turc-Ojac. This is the centre of the new Turkish culture. By means of theatre, cinema, lectures, and a printing-press, the translation of foreign classics and the teaching of European languages, by the institution of primary schools and dispensaries in the villages, it seeks the consolidation of Turkish nationalism, the emancipation of women and an improved standard of general education.

Under the presidency of Hamdulla Soubli Bey, this remarkable institution started nineteen years ago in one room in a back street of Constantinople. In those days the chairs for its meetings were borrowed from a café below. Halidé Khanoum Edib, young Turkey's Joan of Arc, made her first fiery speeches and tore off the veil she detested in that upper chamber whose occupants overflowed into the alley when there was no more room within. Now the Turc-Ojac, radio-active centre of all that is most progressive in the new republic, possesses 32,000 members and 257 centres. Two-thirds of the National Assembly belong to it and eight out of the ten ministers. Hamdulla Soubli Bey, erstwhile minister, grey, slight, distinguished by an ordered enthusiasm, has the pulse of young Turkey in his fingers; but outside his office windows there is one of those ubiquitous statues of the Ghazi, showing the man who conceived, constructed, holds, and dominates Angora as he appears to the majority of his followers. At a Legation reception, the Ghazi is responsive and, according to the Americans, "very much all there." As his car flashes through the city on its way to the farm where he is experimenting with most forms of intensive agriculture, Mustafa Kemal shrinks to the average stature of humanity, a small man brooding over great schemes. But in metal, raised above the rocks he blasted, dominating the streets he planned, he represents the spirit of young Turkey, undaunted by anything within itself, yet defiant and always on the defensive against the impact of anything foreign.

Nobody who has had the opportunity of comparing

Constantinople and Angora is likely to misunderstand this attitude.

When I was in the Anatolian capital, a commission occupied the best rooms in the hotel and discussed the refunding of the Ottoman Debt. Turkish bankers were amused and politely obdurate. Chauvinistic to the core, they thought in terms of "Turkey first," and hang the rest of the world, but they were too intelligent to say so.

The Foreign Minister, working sixteen hours out of the twenty-four, in spite of half a dozen ailments caught while accompanying his master on an inspection of snowbound but strategic regions, was non-committal and idealistic. The new Turk is shrewd. He makes the most of that agreeable weapon forged by liberalism when first the powers of Europe decided to dismember the sick man at their gates. It is impossible to dispute with the idealist. The Turk knows it and becomes Gladstonian for the confounding of his adversaries.

There was—there is, I suppose—perhaps there always will be, a financial crisis in Turkey. A militant government attempted to cope with the situation by measures heroic rather than practical, for the edict forbidding the purchase of all foreign sterling has temporarily put an end to commerce, but Turkey has been in worse plight and Angora is her vindication.

The old Turkey clings to the shores of the Bosphorus, where Constantinople, beautiful and inert, reflects the cosmopolitan existence of the Ottoman Empire.

In the days of Abdul Hamid the Turks were guests in their own country. Exploited by every other nationality, their industry and finance were in the hands of foreigners. Armenians, Jews, and Greeks, as well as the Western powers, battened on concessions granted by the Ottoman Government, and in order to make as much money as possible out of the "sick man of Europe," they built zig-zag railways across the plains, thus increasing the kilometrage which was the measure of their payment, and delivered guns that would not fire, machinery that would not work, and

consignments of army boots with soles made of cardboard.

The old Turkey was rotten with graft, and her unwieldy empire—stretching from the frontiers of Austria to the Persian Gulf—was a source of weakness rather than strength. The Turks were always in a minority, and under the Capitulations, the government had no power over its foreign subjects. In the case of Levantines, there was always some consul of a great Power ready to step in on behalf of his country's protégés, and should the government rouse itself to protest, the arrival of a warship reminded the Porte that the position of Constantinople placed her at the mercy of Europe.

No wonder that the first object of the new Turkey was to build a capital beyond reach of Western guns. Faced with deliberate destruction in the guise of the Treaty of Sèvres, the Turks invented soldiers out of the Anatolian rocks; they created an army which drove the Greeks into the sea and effectually defied the Western powers. In the person of Ismet Pasha, they produced a match for Lord Curzon, for Turkey alone pays no war indemnity; and after the Treaty of Lausanne, which saw, not the rebirth of the loosely-held Turkish Empire, but the foundation for the first time in history of a homogeneous Turkish state, they organized a government, evolved a characteristic nationalism, and built a capital on American lines, with an eye to the future rather than the past.

Their achievements are the more remarkable in view of the fact that the Turks are soldiers. They are not organizers, or business men, or financiers, and in their natural reaction against all that was connected with the Ottoman Empire, they refused to employ the few trained men they had. They would have nothing to do with Europe, and the Chauvinistic policy of Ismet Pasha—to whom, however, the country owes its political existence—precluded both foreign loans and foreign advisers.

All that Turkey has done up to date, and it is a

great deal, she has done by herself and paid for it out of revenue. But, because she is a military nation, thinking first and last of self-defence, more than half her budget has been devoted to unproductive expenditure. Approximately forty per cent. has been allotted to the army and the gendarmerie, and a further considerable sum to the building of strategic railways which have little or no economic value. Thirteen per cent. is usually devoted to public works, but eight or nine per cent. covers the total expenditure on education, commerce, industry, health, and ports.

Here is one reason for the financial situation, which the Italian stabilization loan of one million sterling, taken in exchange for Turkish pounds at their current value, has done little to relieve.

There have been a series of bad harvests and in the exchange of populations, during which a million so-called Greeks were transported from the neighbourhood of Smyrna, Turkey lost her best agriculturalists and her most active traders. Most of these people were only Greek in name and religion. They spoke nothing but Turkish, and having been settled for generations in the richest districts of Anatolia, they were experts in the culture of vines, fruits, and the more profitable cereals. They were replaced by ignorant peasants who knew nothing whatsoever about agriculture.

Before the War, Turkey, exporting nuts, wool, fruit, tobacco and other natural products, was sure of her regular markets. Bradford bought her mohair and America her dried fruits. But now South Africa and California are her competitors, while the Balkans are yearly increasing their output of tobacco. Thus Turkey is faced with the problem of marketing as well as of production, and her difficulties are increased by the rising standard of hygiene.

During recent years, while her currency has been slowly but regularly depreciating, Turkey has bought munitions, equipment, rolling stock and machinery from abroad on a system of long credits, and as

these are paid in sterling, her pound will automatically fall.

Fortunately, she has now made pacts with Russia and Italy, the two neighbours whom she regarded as most dangerous. A treaty with Greece is pending, and she has come to satisfactory arrangements with Iraq and with France in Syria. It would seem, therefore, that even a nation of soldiers might now relax its attitude of splendid isolation, and seek the foreign loans which are essential to the development of agriculture, industry, transport and irrigation, and which, without return to the shadow of the Capitulations, could be guaranteed by obvious concessions. A recent census put the total population of Turkey at 14,000,000, though it is generally supposed to be more like 9,000,000 or 10,000,000, but it must be remembered that there are 30,000,000 Turks in Russia alone and that, speaking only Turkish, the traveller can make himself understood from the Adriatic to China. Turkey cannot therefore be judged by the boundaries of her present state, for she is the consensus of a vast political and racial opinion stretching over half a continent, and Angora represents her claim to the future.

The modernity of Angora expresses itself, not only in its architecture, posters, manners, and clothing, in its statues of the man it has set up as a barrier against the ambitions of a suspected and suspicious Europe, in its pipe-line and its town-planning, in its creation of something definitely new, yet bearing within itself the seeds of permanency, but in its determination to be sufficient unto itself. Its politics may be illogical, its commitments unwieldy, its projected developments uneconomical, but, isolated between Europe and Asia, it is freed from the spectre of foreign interference. Fear of the dictation which forced the Sultans into the humiliating position of puppet rulers, has developed in Angora an unnecessary complex. The Turk of to-day will accept neither help nor advice. It is, I think, the same quality of fear which determines him on the expulsion of the Armenian and the extermination of

the Kurdish minorities. He sees safety in isolation, and believing that a homogeneous state centred in the present with no memories of an Imperial past or dreams of a Mohamedan paradise, is his best chance of achieving his goal, he is willing to sacrifice the mercenaries and the tributary states as well as the religious leadership which made Ottoman Turkey as vulnerable as she was important.

Angora, to me, is gallant in its conception of a laborious and entirely material future, but outside the city which impinges so unexpectedly and in so incomplete a fashion upon the arid plains, the life of Asia is untouched.

The Anatolian peasants are among the hardiest in the world. Owing to the lack of natural and artificial irrigation and to primitive agricultural implements, they are particularly poor, but they have not even approached the limit of their endurance. They can live—and fight—on nothing. Their sole luxury is a few drops of raki, which potent spirit they will share with any stranger. Their houses are made of mud bricks with flat, roughly-thatched roofs supported on beams. Often there is only one room, with a mud hearth and no furniture except a few scraps of rugs and some goatskins for extra clothing. Yeastless bread and goat cheese are the staple diet.

The Anatolian peasant is hospitable by tradition and instinct. Like the Druse, he considers that the host is the servant of his guest, and his simplicity causes him to offer whatever he has, however poor, with the best possible grace. In the vicinity of Angora he wears a cap and some sort of semi-European suit, with sensible worsted leggings strapped with hide thongs, but on the great plains, where he shepherds his flock of long-haired goats, he retains his embroidered waistcoat, loose bolero, and shapeless trousers, with a turban wound loosely over his skull cap. Wherever I have seen them, the peasant women still wear vast cotton trousers of vivid reds and blues, with a little bodice stuck into them and a scarf drawn across the

lower part of the face. They work in the fields all day and in the house most of the night, for they are satisfied with three or four hours' sleep.

The ploughs are drawn by a mixed team of bullocks and horses, and the carts are curious structures, like *five-foot slings of canvas or hide mounted on four* wheels, which, turning on wooden axles, creak out a cacophony of sound not unlike a number of bagpipes being tuned.

The optimism of the Anatolian peasants is amazing, for their deserts are to a great extent waterless, and in certain seasons, devoid of either fodder or fuel. Typical of this undaunted spirit is the sight of a solitary rider, hunched on the quarters of the smallest imaginable donkey, heading for no visible destination in what appears to be an unlimited waste, punctuated only by mirage.

In the towns nationalism has, to a great extent, taken the place of religion. The modern Turk is either a free-thinker or a student of metaphysics, but the peasant is unaffected by the disestablishment of the Church. He retains a blind faith in Allah, to which he has added a scarcely less implicit one in the Ghazi. Mohamed is the Prophet of God, but the President is certainly his Vice-regent.

CHAPTER II

VEILED AND UNVEILED WOMEN OF THE MIDDLE EAST

TURKEY has suffered a female revolution and come out of it unscathed, except that, nowadays, the average pretty young Constantinopolitan would probably rather marry a foreigner than one of her own compatriots. For masculine human nature is hard to change, whether it be Western or Eastern, and the ordinary Turk grudges "this freedom" which the Ghazi has bestowed upon women. He clings to his old authority and is surprised at the enthusiasm with which his wife acclaims the new régime. Yet, in this intermediate generation, between the harem and the polling-booth, freedom to most Eastern women means no more than the possibility of a good education.

Before the War, the inmates of the sophisticated harems in Stamboul spoke half a dozen languages and studied the literature of as many different countries. To-day their daughters crowd the universities, but they consider intensive education as an end in itself rather than as the first step to a career.

"What are you going to do after you leave college?" I asked a young woman of twenty-two, who had recently taken a degree.

"I don't know," she replied; and urged to consider the matter further, concluded: "well, I'm ambitious, so I suppose, if I get a good offer, I shall marry."

Next day I met the only woman lawyer in Angora. She works on the '*Conseil d'État*,' which may perhaps be translated as the Privy Council, so, presumably she is well on the way towards the top of her profession, yet, when she accepted a cocktail from our mutual host, her father frowned at her. "Put it down. It

is not good for you," he ordered in an undertone. His intellectual daughter, who is considered one of the personalities of the capital, obeyed at once.

"Tell me," I said to her when we found ourselves secluded on a sofa, "do the majority of Turkish girls hanker after a career, or is a husband still their main objective?"

For a while the dark-browed young woman hesitated. Then she said frankly: "I think most girls want a husband and a house of their own, but they would like to have a good education first."

But, a few days later, I was talking to another young woman, twenty-three and with no special prospects. "No; I don't want to marry," she said. "I am much freer as I am. Now I only have to obey my father, and whenever I ask him if I can do something he always says 'yes'; but if I were married, I should have to obey a husband who might not be so indulgent."

Yet the Turkish woman has progressed far beyond her neighbours in Syria and Palestine. She has the European code, which gives her equal rights of divorce, together with complete control of her person and her property; whereas by the *Sheria* law of Damascus, Jerusalem and Baghdad, a man may divorce his wife after twelve hours, providing he repays her dowry. Many a man has ended his honeymoon and his marriage at the same time and sent a disillusioned child of sixteen or seventeen back to her parents, for no other reason than that, when he first saw her after the wedding-ceremony, driving away to his house, complete strangers, yet man and wife by law, he found she was not quite as pretty as his mother—who chose her—had led him to suppose.

To realize the magnitude of Turkey's evolution, one must compare the position of the educated women in Constantinople and Angora, whom one sees dancing at the foreign Legations, or attending lectures at the university, with that of their neighbouring contemporaries. In Syria, for instance, the only career open to women is that of a teacher in the elementary schools.

True, five *veiled* girls are working in one corner of the men's class in the medical school at Damascus, but they will practise only on children and on their own sex.

In Syria, a woman must go to the courts for a divorce, but a man can still dismiss his wife the morning after he has married her.

The streets are crowded with slow-moving black figures, unrecognizable under a veil which ranges from a single thickness of black crêpe de Chine to three solid layers of a denser stuff, through which it is impossible to see more than a vague outline.

Beirut has recently instituted a B.A. degree for women, but otherwise life in Syria is much the same as it was twenty and fifty years ago. There are shuttered compartments for women on trams and trains. Cinemas and theatres have special women's nights when no "man over eight years old" is admitted. At the chief restaurants there is a women's section carefully screened from the rest of the room, and when I called on a comparatively emancipated friend, the crone who admitted me wouldn't even mention her name before the men smoking water-pipes in the hall until H. E. the Pasha should signify his readiness to receive them.

When I did get upstairs by divers and sufficiently secret ways, I found a committee in progress. A dozen women in long, dark coats, which have taken the place of the all-enveloping and entirely shapeless cloak (the habbara) of the last generation, their veils thrown back, were discussing, with the aid of Turkish coffee and the tiniest possible cigarettes, the formation of a national girls' school, for which they had already collected £800. "We are very proud because it has all been contributed by women," said my friend, "and you know how poor Syria is at this moment. We've given up most of our pleasures and all our vanities to get together the money, because the French don't encourage feminine education and we want a school of our own, where our daughters will be taught patriotism and politics as well as domestic economy." A brave ambition!

In Syria, each sex says the other is not sufficiently advanced to justify unveiling, but feeling has changed since the days when in the open bazaars, an Imam spat in an Englishwoman's face because he did not approve of its being shown in public, or even since 1920 when, by order of the Pasha, the police were armed with huge scissors with which they slashed the *habbara* of any woman lax enough to show an ankle or a wrist under the stifling drapery which collected the dust of the street and attracted innumerable flies.

But, even to-day, the only women employed in Damascan offices or shops are Jewesses, for the old-fashioned Christian families seclude their daughters almost as rigidly as their Moslem neighbours, whereas in Angora the number of girl typists, clerks and secretaries is increasing every year.

The typists' ball at Constantinople provided a scene which might have been staged in any Western capital, but a year earlier, for the long skirts have not yet come East. The Turkish typist still measures her modernity by the stiffness of her permanent waves and the small amount of material in her skirt. Though it is rumoured that the standard of feminine beauty is to change, in obedience to Turkey's insistence on Westernization, the Constantinopolitan, whether typist or grande dame, is still addicted to curves. She has lovely eyes, deeply fringed and much painted; thick legs and ankles; very often a beautiful mouth to make up for an indefinite profile; but she does not take enough exercise to acquire a naturally good complexion, and Eastern cosmetics are crude as the colours on a Noah's ark.

In the harem there was leisure to cultivate the charm of good manners, and the Turkish hostess has not lost the art of making each guest feel the object of her particular attention. In this she is unrivalled, for she has the natural grace of the woman who is never hurried; but it is rare to find her interested in affairs outside her own house and her own friends. Turkish men do not generally talk politics or business with the women they meet—still a trifle constrainedly—at dinners

and dances. They pay them many compliments, but when flattery is exhausted, the sexes drift apart and each group is suddenly more animated. I remember a "raki" party at Angora, given by Rouf Bey, the Iraq Minister. It began at six-thirty and continued till the early hours of the morning. The guests sat on carpeted divans and drank innumerable glasses of araki. Water-pipes were handed round; the air grew thick with smoke. But long before dinner was announced to a company who by that time were impervious to anything but habit, two groups had formed. The men, gathered round the low table on which a regiment of bottles guarded olives and cheese, discussed Ismet Pasha's finance bill. The women, relieved for once of the necessity for sitting upright on rows of chairs, were comfortably installed in a corner where they tucked their feet under them and, heads close together, chattered happily about their families.

It is just as impossible to generalize about the women of the Middle East as about any other section of humanity, but it seemed to me that many Turkish wives regretted the leisure of the harem. In their minds the financial stringency of the post-war years is inevitably connected with the freedom bestowed upon them by Mustafa Kemal. "In the old days everything was easy. There was plenty of money. Now it is all so difficult," was the plaint of the bewildered women I met in the old wooden houses, condemned by a provident municipality as inflammable.

The middle-aged Turkish woman has had to adjust herself to an evolution which has done away with so much more than the restrictions on her personal freedom. All the crises of Europe are creeping into Constantinople. To-day there is a housing problem, because young couples will no longer live in the intimacy of the husband's family. They want flats of their own. There is a servant problem, for the old retainers who were slaves are disappearing. There is a cultural one identical all over the Balkans and the Middle East, for the new generation is being educated

beyond the possibility of finding suitable work. What are all these girls and boys, who come out of the American college with excellent degrees, going to do with their knowledge? There are few openings in a country intent on self-preservation by means of a rigorous isolation from all foreign contact. There are women guides in Stamboul and women sweepers in the streets, but it is difficult for the graduate of Roberts College to find salaried work of a kind suited to her attainments.

The first effervescence has subsided. The unveiled woman no longer throws herself, first into a succession of love-affairs and then into the Bosphorus, but she is up against the problem of the labour-market. In Turkey, as in every other country, she will find employment in those conditions where she can undercut the opposite sex; but the majority of administrative posts are likely to remain closed to her, simply because Turkey has not sufficient employment for her young men. A period of friction is inevitable, for women want more than men can afford to give. Turkey cannot employ more than a certain number of doctors, lawyers, technicians and so on. For each vacant post there are anything from twenty to a hundred applicants. Consequently, girls, whatever their qualifications, are forced back into the ranks of elementary teachers, stenographers, secretaries, employees in shops and banks. There are seven women lawyers who are employed largely by their own sex. The institution of a new alphabet has eliminated the ancients, who wrote the letters of an illiterate public with pens as fine as stippling brushes, and filled their places with girls. Commerce and industry have been quick to take advantage of the fact that the newly emancipated young woman is more adaptable than her brothers. She will work longer hours for less wages. But competition is keen and each year it is likely to increase.

In Europe youth has created, or is on its way to creating, an original relationship between the sexes, based on a variety of common purposes; but in Turkey

friendship between men and women is still at a discount. Co-educated students share their work, but not their play. It is still comparatively rare to see a man and a woman lunching, driving or walking together.

"We really had much more freedom in the old days," said a perverse Constantinopolitan. "Nobody knew what we were doing. We could go where we liked. The yashmak reduced us all to the same pattern. Under her haik, every woman was in a world of her own and nobody could question her." But serious-minded youth, intent on education, would not agree with her. It seemed to me that the girls were taking life hard. Singularly defenceless, for to the average Turk the unveiling of women is no less superficial a gesture than the substitution of a bowler for a fez, they are earnestly seeking the freedom which the West is almost ready to discard.

Turkish women have been deprived simultaneously of custom, tradition and creed. A few of them, like Halidé Khanoum Edib, have been able to substitute an intensive nationalism for the cult of domesticity to which their mothers and grandmothers were dedicated. But, on the whole, I imagine the unveiled Turkish woman, in the whirlpool of transitory conditions, is as aware of frustration as of opportunity.

Long ago I asked Halidé Khanoum, then a leading spirit of the revolutionary Committee of Union and Progress, whether she worked for Turkey or for Islam. At that moment she replied: "I do not really know. I must think it out"; and later: "no, it is not religion—it is, quite definitely, for my country."

A few months ago, eating rose-leaf jam in one of the very new houses of Angora, I asked my hostess if the claims of nationalism had effectively routed those of Islam in the new capital. "Among the men, yes," she said; and I remembered a most delightful and amusing member of the National Assembly who had represented Turkey at the Meccan Moslem Conference in a bowler hat and a tweed suit, less concerned with the Koran than with the possibility of getting

apoplexy in a climate which he stigmatized as "possibly holy, but certainly uncivilized."

"And what about the women?" I asked; realizing how effectively the middle-aged Turkish lady maintains the reserve with which the harem tradition has endowed her. "For us, it is different," said my hostess, whose three daughters were respectively a lawyer, an author and a doctor. "This freedom is taking our children from us, and we must rely on another life for what we lose in this."

One of the daughters was in the room, a brooding young creature with a frown between her heavy brows. "There must be something in religion," she interpolated; "but we are too busy with all we've got to do for Turkey to trouble much about the future; there may be time later. . . ."

This freedom, so momentous to the youth of the city and productive of so much conflict between class, generation and sex, has left the peasant woman unchanged. She still works all day in the fields and most of the night in her one-roomed mud-built house, for in the Anatolian plains sleep is reduced to a minimum. Like her husband, she is unmoved by the disestablishment of the church, for there is no God but Allah and He is great. Like him, she is a firm believer in the polygamy which, long ago, went out of fashion in the towns, for, without it, how would she get any rest at all?

"Don't you mind your husband re-marrying?" I asked an elderly peasant, whose three sons had been killed in the war.

"How should I mind? I chose the girl myself. She is fourteen and very docile. She will be like a sister in the house and she will do much of the work. It is time that I sat still a little, for my joints are stiff; but this girl is strong, and *Insballah*, she will have sons, so that there will be someone to work for our old age, else how should we exist?"

CHAPTER III

SYRIA AND THE DARK MOUNTAIN OF THE DRUSES

FROM Anatolia I went into Syria by the Taurus express, which is a very efficient train, destined eventually for Baghdad. Of that three days' journey I remember only the great arch at Baalbek like a span of gold rising above the orchards.

Damascus is quieter than it used to be when I first knew it twelve years ago. Then it was the capital of an Arab state which had declared its own independence. Reft by innumerable disputes, it was foredoomed to destruction. France, obsessed by memories of La Reine Claude and "*Partons pour la Syrie*," driven by the Jesuits and the silk interests of Lyons, was intent on colonization in the shape of a mandate. England was tearing up inconvenient promises as rapidly as she could.

So Arab Syria ceased to exist except as the memory of a spring madness. Her king (now Feisul of Iraq) was unnecessarily exiled, for it is probable that even the Quai d'Orsay would now acknowledge that by an alliance with him they might have gained everything for which they have fought and wrangled during a fruitless decade.

Since 1920 the history of Syria has been a succession of hopeless rebellions, punctuated by alternate slaughter and concessions. When General Sarrail turned his guns on the undefended *suqs* of Damascus, he planted the seeds which bore fruit in the Druse war of 1925, just as the arbitrary exile of several hundred Druses must inevitably foment an unrest which only waits on opportunity.

It may be that the existing forms of Government in Syria and Palestine are unnecessarily cumbersome. They impinge on the lives, possessions and activities of the inhabitants to an extent which must produce continual conflict. But it is in Syria that the problem is most acute. To this loosely-woven mesh of dissident races, with a dozen religious sects, all violently distrustful of the others, France came in Napoleonic fashion. She saw herself as the Deliverer and was welcomed as such by the more sophisticated elements among the Christians of the Lebanon whose spiritual—and sartorial—home had long been Paris.

Rendered unduly confident by her success in North Africa where she had played the part of Rome, France hoped to administer her mandated territory for what she conceived as the mutual profit of all parties concerned. But she did not realize that she had to deal with a continent in miniature.

There is nothing in common between the Christian sects of the Lebanon (Maronites, Metouelis, Greek Orthodox, Nestorians, Catholics and Armenians) and the old-fashioned Moslems of Damascus. There is just as little, though they would not acknowledge it, between the fluent young nationalists who drive American cars on the excellent French-made roads and the obstinate fighting tribes who suffer for a political chicanery by which they will be the last to benefit.

Syria has had too much of politics. She has too much of everything, too much government and too much taxation, too many races and religions, too many nationalists and ministries and officials. She is poorer than I have ever known her, for her gold was taken in exchange for paper money, which has deteriorated with the franc, till, according to the most articulate of the nationalists, her people own but a quarter of their old-time wealth.

Twelve years ago, the *suqs* in Damascus were crowded like an ant-heap. Life swarmed in and around the cells of what was a vast commercial hive. Merchandise overflowed into the streets. Trade was so

brisk that its clamour echoed against the arched roof of the Street called Straight. To-day, the *suqs* are comparatively silent. There is room to walk. It is possible to carry on an uninterrupted conversation.

Syria is too poor to buy. She has nothing to sell. She has suffered overmuch. Torn by her own dissentients as well as by mandatory bullets, she is, at the moment, inert. Men and women still talk politics, but, perhaps mercifully, they are too exhausted to do more than talk.

Such conditions, however, are not likely to endure. Iraq is to enter the League of Nations in 1932. The Hope-Simpson and Shaw reports have aroused Arab hopes in Palestine. Egypt can be counted on to get nine-tenths of what she wants, because our Foreign Office is haunted by the spectre of an appeal to the League of Nations. And it is reported that Monsieur Ponsot, High Commissioner of Syria, has remarked: *"Il faut bien que nous marchons au même pas que l'Angleterre."*

The impetus, therefore, will come from outside and when it comes, there will be another rebellion in Syria, for the tribes are unsatisfied and unsubdued, though the towns are only the former.

It is easy to see what is wrong in Palestine. Two commissions have discovered the weak spots in our régime, and suggested what may prove remedial treatment, but Syria offers a more difficult problem. Not the most determined Arabophile could sincerely suggest that France should cede her mandate and leave what could at best be no more than a confederation of discordant interests to rule as many different elements by means of proportional representation.

Under French rule, Aleppo has grown into an imposing Western town. Armenian refugees have been hospitably welcomed and settled in their industrious and productive thousands in various hitherto undeveloped regions. However they may grumble, the Christian minorities know perfectly well that they owe their security to France. It is just because they

A TYPICAL VILLAGE NEAR ALEPPO

are protected and encouraged that they have become exorbitant in their demands.

I have heard it said of Syria, as of Ireland, that she doesn't know what she wants and won't be happy till she gets it, but every Syrian from Jebel Druse to Beirut will express in no uncertain terms his desire for "national freedom." The difficulty is that he hasn't the least conception of what it means, or how it can be achieved. By the civilized townsmen of the Lebanon it may be interpreted as complete autonomy with an elective parliamentary system and a treaty with France, according to which the most productive portion of Syria shall gain everything and give nothing.

To the Moslems of Damascus, it means a united Syrian kingdom, or republic, including absolute dominion over the Christian Lebanon and the Druses of the Hauran, who are only Arab in name and Moslem in nothing at all.

The Druses on the other hand expect the term to include the mediæval right of raiding, and all future questions arising from twenty different conceptions of nationalism, they are prepared to settle at the end of a rifle.

It is highly probable that to Armenians and such strange survivals as the devil-worshippers of Jebel Sinjar, within the borders of Iraq, the most consoling definition of freedom would be incorporation within a French colony.

Out of all this conflict of ideas, some loosely-knit confederation with a representative chamber in Damascus or Beirut, each the obvious capital of a different outlook, may possibly be evolved, but no unbiased observer, however shocked he may be at the state to which a mandate swaying between colonization and martial law, has reduced a comfortable if quarrelsome Turkish province, can under-estimate the difficulties with which the Mandatory Power has had to contend.

Meanwhile Damascus is sullen and quiescent. The surrounding country, recovering painfully from civil war, is being laid waste by regiments of locusts and

the Druses are enlisting—possibly with some amusement—in a newly-formed squadron of irregular cavalry, which the French regard as a weapon against revolt, but which may perhaps have the disadvantage of a boomerang.

They are interesting people.

Between the deserts of Nejd and the great plain of Hauran lies the dark mountain called Jebel Druse. It is an ancient volcano which accounts for the rocks heaped in every direction, a veritable storm of rocks overwhelming the barley and the pale green narcissus which sheet the plain. With these black stones have been built the houses of Sueida and the other mountain villages, so that the autonomous state of the Druses appears to be in perpetual mourning. A plague of locusts battens on the Hauran, and he who would approach the mountain must literally fight his way through droves of these beasts—they are too large to be called insects. The noise of their wings is like a jazz orchestra, the impact of their bodies like blank cartridges. Sometimes for an hour or two they blot out the sun and when they have passed, the land is stripped bare.

The mountain is really a series of hills, rock-girt and sombre, the stronghold of sixty thousand Druses, who believe that Solomon was the originator of their faith and that the Jewish monarch was re-incarnated again and again, until in the person of Hakim, a Fatimite Caliph of Egypt (A.D. 996), he promulgated the secret laws which for nine hundred years have governed this strange sect. The Moslems claim them as heretical Shias, but the Druses speak of "those Mohamedans," and maintain complete silence with regard to their own religion.

The Caliph Hakim is said never to have looked at a woman. He rode always on a donkey; wore a single woollen robe when the luxury of the Egyptian Court rivalled that of Haroun er Rashid, and governed his life by the mystic numeral seven. His followers, Darazi, and Hamza ibn Ali, brought the curious mixture

of freemasonry, philosophy, Christianity, Greek and other mythologies which originally constituted their faith to the Syrian mountain which now bears the name of Hakim's first disciple.

To-day, there are perhaps a hundred thousand Druses in different parts of Arabia, but they believe that all the great men of history, including Christ, have shared their faith, and that with the final reincarnation of Hakim as the long-awaited Saviour of the world, millions of Druses will suddenly appear and the mastery of the whole earth be in their hands. This is the mountain's idea of paradise.

Meanwhile this hardy, obstinate, self-sufficient race believes in reincarnation. According to their learned men, the number of souls never varies. They simply pass from one body to another. The highest incarnation is that of a warrior, and Druses always reincarnate in the same sect. In the mountain there is a particularly bad tribe of Moslems called the Chararat and local legend insists that Christians are invariably reincarnated among these low and untrustworthy people!

The sacred number is repeated throughout the religious life of the mountain. There are seven teachers and seven sacred books, seven precepts, seven sections of knowledge, seven houses, or circles, wherein the initiates may meet and some of the elders grow their beards for seven years in imitation of Hakim. No converts are accepted and no marriage allowed outside the sect.

The Druses believe in divine unity. The second principle ordains truth under all circumstances; consequently no Druse ever disowns a debt, or fails to stand up for his own opinion among his fellows, but his honesty is not always extended to transactions with the unbeliever. The Holy War is another principle, obedience to authority a fourth, mutual assistance a fifth.

There are three degrees of initiates of which, under the spiritual leaders, the ajawids are the highest. These can be distinguished by their long black robes and

white turbans, while the "ignorant" and "corporeal" classes, who have not yet been initiated, wear the usual Bedouin mantle made of brown camel-hair, with a flowing white headdress (the kufiya) bound by ropes of goats' hair.

Ajawids greet each other by clasping hands, and in this position, each man kisses his own hand quickly several times. The uninitiated salute their elders with a kiss on the shoulder and their fellows by one on each cheek.

There are no mosques or minarets to break the monotony of dark houses piled up the hillside one upon another like the cells of a honeycomb. The megliss is a hall wherein all degrees may meet to hear a sermon, or a reading from one of the seven books, but the ceremony for initiates changes from house to house. No one knows when it will take place, or who will preside.

Women can be initiated up to the third degree, and marriage is only allowed between ajawids. If one of these initiates marries an "ignorant," he or she is exiled from the magliss. A Druse who married outside the sect would probably be slain at the first opportunity. They are not polygamous, but the husband can divorce his wife at will without any ceremony or reference to law. He simply tells her to go back to her people, and if he and she both re-marry—as is generally the case—the children of their first union are orphans, for neither father nor mother acknowledge responsibility for them.

The chastity of women is so closely guarded that wives and sisters are liable to be killed on the suspicion of infidelity. Even before she is married, a girl may have her throat cut by her brother if he discovers she has a lover.

Marriages entail no religious ceremony. The minimum price of a wife is legally fixed at four thousand pesetas, about £6, for a maiden, and half that sum for a widow or a divorcee. A contract is drawn up between the girl's father and a proxy sent by the bridegroom, and as soon as the money is paid, the man

may take away his bride. Girls of good families often fetch as much as £100, and, if you ask a Druse chieftain why he sells his daughter in this fashion, he will probably reply: "So that I can have something on which to support her if she is divorced and comes back to my house."

Family affection is not a strong point among the Druses, and because the women do most of the work and live under the worst possible conditions, they are old before they are twenty-five. They are not completely veiled and you see them picking their way across the cataract of black stones out of which Sueida is being leisurely rebuilt, in embroidered jackets, sometimes open so that the breasts are visible, full black skirts bunched up over many bright-coloured petticoats, their bodices belted high under the bust with silver-studded leather. They plait their hair with scarlet cords which hang to the hem of the skirt and wear curious metal caps, like small baking-tins, under long white veils which they wind across their mouths and sometimes over one eye.

The wealth of the Druses is in their sheep, which they hand over to the Bedouin tribes also inhabiting the mountain. These nomad shepherds take a quarter of the lambs, the wool, the butter, cheese and milk as payment for shepherding their employers' flocks far out in the desert in winter and in the Jebel in summer.

Land tenure is distinctly communistic, for every village is divided into four parts and so much acreage is allotted to each. This is subdivided among the resident families and they, in turn, apportion a share to every male. But such tenure is limited to four years, after which there is a redistribution, so that no one may consider he has been favoured above his neighbours.

Before the French occupation there were no courts of justice. The ruling family, the El Atrashes, tried such cases as could not be settled by blood-money, and the Druses still speak of this period as "before the law." Blood-money was paid according to the rank

of the slain, but always it included the number thirty-three. Thus the sum demanded for the death of a chieftain might be thirty-three thousand or thirty-three hundred piastres, and for a beggar thirty-three piastres.

Blood feuds were constant, but if the guilty party or, in some cases, the whole of his family, could take refuge in the house of the victim, the law of hospitality forbade any further retaliation. It is told of one of the great families, involved in a particularly violent feud, that the chieftain awoke one morning to find all his enemies encamped in his yard. By this means they had become his guests and he could do nothing but entertain them!

It is this strange people, stalwart, cheerful and incredibly enduring, who held the French at bay for nearly a decade. For two years they were actively at war, and from the midst of their black volcanic stones, out of which the villages grope like dark fungi, they defied the tanks and aeroplanes, the guns and regiments of an army corps. When, after desperate fighting, the French at last penetrated the mountain, they found it deserted. Thousands of Druses had slipped away into the desert, taking with them their flocks and herds, their families and furniture. Many of them returned under a truce to discuss conditions with the first Western power to penetrate their strongholds and remained to watch "the coming of the law."

Lazily, but with comparative cheerfulness, they began to rebuild their walls. The French introduced football as well as a school and a dispensary. They remitted taxes until lands were re-tilled and flocks brought up to strength. They introduced a criminal court presided over by two French and three Druse judges. Their Agricultural Bank advanced money for seeds and implements at six per cent. instead of the twenty-five per cent. charged by Damascan money-lenders.

To-day, young Hassan el Atrash rules the dark mountain as Emir, and his cousin, a magnificent old man with the wisdom and perchance the guile of

EMIR HASSAN EL ATRASH, THE PRESENT RULER OF JEBEL DRUSE (SECOND FROM RIGHT) AND GAFER PASHA EL ATRASH (SECOND FROM LEFT)

Abraham, is Director of the Interior. Under him there is a local administrator for each district and a headman for every village, while in the person of Clement de Grandcourt, France contributes an able governor of that still mysterious state which is known as Jebel Druse.

But some hundred miles away, on the edge of the great desert, there still dwells in exile Sultan el Atrash, the hero of the mountain, mighty warrior and despot, who led the Druses in their incredible attack upon and still more amazing defence against the forces of Western civilization. I am not sure that the mountain wholeheartedly desires his return. His reckless gallantry cost too much in lives and property, but so long as Druse history is handed down among the stark black rocks heaped around the ruins of Roman temples, his name will stand for the utmost courage and endurance of which a fighting race is capable.

CHAPTER IV

WITH SULTAN EL ATRASH IN WADI SIRHAN

WHEN I left Jebel Druse, it was with the determination to visit Sultan el Attash in the Wadi Sirhan.

"Nationalism in all these countries is a disease. We must bring to bear on it the pressure of modern science," said the French officer who showed me round Sueida. He was a Spahi and he understood the temperament of the North African Arab, but the Druse is far more obstinate than a mule. It is impossible for him to conceive a state of dependence. He knows no cure for unwelcome interference but a bullet. He is a philosopher and a fatalist. Living cheek by jowl with civilization, he is incapable of profiting by it because in his mind is clamped the dual idea of protecting his own possessions by means of a rifle and obtaining other people's, together with the best possible sport, by means of a raid.

"What a country this would be were it not for patriots and locusts," continued the Spahi, his mind South of the Atlas where France guards the frontier of a successfully imposed civilization against the nomads of the red desert.

All the doors in Sueida had been painted bright blue in honour of a national fête. These and the embroidered coats of the women were the only splashes of colour in the village. Down among the dark-stoned houses we walked, the Frenchman expatiating on the benefits of modernity. "*Voyons* what we have done here. We've given them good roads and a water supply. Before we came, they used to drink that. . . ." He pointed to what must have been a gigantic Roman

ARMENIAN REFUGEES IN SYRIA

SUEIDA, THE CAPITAL OF JEBEL DRUSE

reservoir sunk between tiers of houses, like an amphitheatre among ascending seats. It was half full of stagnant water, in which doubtless the pre-war Druses had bathed and washed their clothing before drinking at their ease. But they thrived on it.

Outside Jebel Druse, I think the Syrian appreciates the increased communications which facilitate his business. He is learning to use the telephone without shaking it and shouting at the top of his voice. Electricity is acknowledged superior to a candle stuck in a lantern. But the mentality of the Druse is kin to that of the old Moor on a donkey to whom I once offered a lift. Eyeing my car with disfavour, he thanked me, but pointed out that he too would reach Fez in three days—or four. "But I can take you there in a couple of hours," I protested. "Allah save you, but I am not in a hurry," he replied.

The Druse is not in a hurry. This year, or next year, or five years hence is all the same to him, providing he is left alone.

By car I went across the Hauran. Locusts battered themselves against the windscreen, dying as helplessly and with as little result as insurgent Druses, Riffs or Kurds. The horde of insects darkened the sky. Our progress was slow, but it was not arrested. So the tribesmen of half a dozen isolated strongholds, Mount Ararat, Jebel Druse or the Riff, have smashed themselves against the modern Juggernaut represented in turn by Turkey, France or Spain, and like the locusts bleeding all over my American roadster, ended their lives without diverting the uncomprehended monster called civilization.

The same night I was in Amman, where there were echoes of conflict between an able British Resident, determined that there should be no national, or Zionist, or indeed any other question in Trans-Jordan, and those stirred to subterranean activity by the retreat from Jebel Druse.

At first a number of the exiles had taken refuge in Amman where they eked out a tenuous existence by

working as labourers, but perhaps their fingers were more accustomed to the trigger than the spade. There were complaints. Trans-Jordan is a well-ordered state with no room for dissidents. The Druses were turned out and they had nowhere to go. France objected to their settling in Azraq.* Palestine could not receive them—she has enough troubles of her own. There had been a ghastly episode in which men, women and children, flying from the mountain with neither water nor food, had tried to reach a well within the confines of Trans-Jordan and had been kept away by the rifles of the Frontier Force. "It was pretty horrible for us," said a British officer, "because though they were armed, they did not fire on us."

Eventually, the exhausted remnant of a people who had sacrificed everything they possessed to defend the independence of the land they had held since the days of the Caliph Hakim, established themselves in Wadi Sirhan, where for six months of the year, the sands are blistering and so incredibly barren that they look like metal.

No animal can live in that desert. But several hundred human beings are condemned to exile in it, without any chance to grow or earn a livelihood. Their supplies come from Trans-Jordan by a route which could be blocked at any moment. Exiled from their own mountains, ringed by the enmity of political expediency, accused of participation in every raid which disturbs Nairn's desert highway, they are outcasts, living from one week's exiguous rations to another, and dependent for those on the charity of distant sympathizers which is thinned to vanishing point by the time it reaches Wadi Sirhan.

If their desolate existence festers in the minds of officialdom, the choice of remedies seems to be limited to extermination by means of an aerial bombing party, or slow starvation by stopping supplies, for no order to "move on" is within the bounds of practical possibility. They have "moved on" beyond the limits of

* Azraq is the no-man's land between Nejd and Trans-Jordan.

the sown, beyond the last range of pasture. They have no animals. Nothing grows on their metallic sands. They are on the borders of that relentless desert wherein, if it ever existed, life is extinct.

As for the project which I had conceived in Jebel Druse, it began to materialize on the night I arrived in Amman. Several people were very busy conjuring a car and a guide out of the sleepy *suqs*. Emphasis was laid on the necessity for strict discretion, for authority does not encourage visits to Sultan el Atrash.

Shortly after dawn we slipped away from Amman with a conspiratorial feeling, four bottles of water and an inadequate supply of food. The party consisted of an Arab driver, muffled in an immense tasselled kufiya, a Druse who said he knew the way, a Bedouin armed with rifle and water-pipe, and myself.

"We must take the secret road," they said; "thus shall we avoid being questioned by the police."

So we plunged into a gully, through which it seemed impossible that any car could proceed, for there was no track at all and the boulders were thick as pebbles on a beach.

During the first hour we covered six miles, but after that we found ourselves on the plains, where the Beni Sakhr pasture vast herds of camels, sheep and goats.

At the fiftieth mile we passed the last landmark between Trans-Jordan and the no-man's-land of Azraq, a mighty ruined fortress older than Islam.

"The only time I went inside," volunteered the driver, "someone tried to cut my throat." He made a realistic gesture and we decided not to venture within.

All day we drove across a waste of black stones. Occasionally, a dry wadi broke the monotony, and where stretches of sand were tufted with brittle grey scrub, mirage transformed them into boats, trees and battlements. The ground was so hard that our wheels left no track and towards sunset the inevitable happened. We lost the way.

The Arab drove in circles, protesting that we must

soon come upon some trace of the camp we sought, till the Druse seized him by the throat. Frightful altercations ensued, followed by forlorn and futile pilgrimages to the summits of various hillocks from which there was nothing to be seen but the desert. On we went, heading towards Qaf, outpost of Ibn Saud, and in the middle of a last deafening quarrel, in which the Bedouin predicted a terrible death for us all, black tents appeared in the one direction where my three companions had all agreed they could not possibly be.

"Wallah!" said the driver, whose mind evidently worked in a groove. "If it is the Druse camp, there should be white tents among the 'houses of hair.' These may be Wahabis and if so they will cut our throats."

I thought it unlikely and ordered direct advance. That bee-line across scrub and hillocks nearly finished the car, but, as the sun sank, we reached the camp and were greeted by a pack of furious mongrels which flung themselves at the motor as if it had been a gazelle.

Thirty or forty camel-hair tents were scattered over a rise, with half a dozen squat mud towers guarding the outskirts. From the largest came a group of men, burned by wind and sun, marked by five relentless years on the border of starvation.

"Your coming is good. Welcome and welcome," said Sultan el Atrash, who is tall and dark, with a gigantic moustache. His heavy brows shelter the creased lids and keen eyes of a man who habitually scans a sunlit horizon, or peers along the barrel of a rifle.

We followed him into the tent, which was open on one side to the desolation of burnèd sand and sapless scrub. Thirty feet from where we sat a tasselled woollen hanging shut off the women's quarters. In the middle of the floor, which was hard as stone, there was a sunken hearth, and while we still murmured greetings, a boy came running with an armful of the grey brushwood. Soon there was a fire and mouthfuls of bitter coffee poured out of a long beaked pot.

SULTAN EL ATRASH (SECOND FROM RIGHT)
WITH THE AUTHOR IN WADI SIRHAN

A GROUP OF EXILED DRUSES IN WADI SIRHAN

"From whence did you come to the Wadi Sirhan?" asked our host, who, since the British refused him asylum in the neutral zone of Azraq, has been living with some twelve hundred devoted followers in a series of camps strung along the depression which leads to Nejd.

We described our journey from Amman.

"What is this talk of Trans-Jordan?" asked our host. "I cannot think of Palestine, Syria, Iraq and all the other countries into which your people have divided Arabia. To me it is all one land and an Arab land."

Our cups were replenished. More and more dark figures stole into the tent, shuffling out of their shoes at the threshold, till some eighty warriors in worn camel-hair cloaks with white cotton kufiyas bound over their heads sat round us and listened while Sultan el Atrash explained. "Under the Turks we were rich and life was easy. With one paper (passport) a man could travel from Beirut to Aden. Now in a day's journey he must write his name in many different books. (District police regulations.) Wallahi, how can the country prosper when there are so many different governments, each selling concessions to its own people, and a set of customs at the end of every march? Trade is dead, because Damascus is cut off from Jerusalem and both from Baghdad, yet all are members of the same family, dependent on the same fortune."

We asked him about the war, during which for two years, with a handful of untrained mountaineers, this Arab Napoleon defended his mountains against the whole might of France.

Sultan el Atrash clicked a string of amber beads between his fingers, but he neither smiled nor made any movement of his muscular frame hunched cross-legged under a brown abbaya. "For many years we waited for the French to fulfil the promises under which they accepted the mandate. There was no end to our petitions for a national government, but the land for which we had fought, imagining to better ourselves

by driving out the Turks, was no longer ours at all. Where there had been one official, there were now twenty. Taxes were increased five and six times. Our gold was exchanged for paper money which deteriorated till it was worth a fifth of what we had paid for it. The officers who ordered us without reason had neither beards nor sense. Then one day they captured a guest to whom I had promised security and I said to my people: 'Let us go and get him back.' So we went down and met a tank which was open because of the heat and I leaped on the step and cut at the first head I saw. It was not a good fight because they were surprised, but it was the beginning of war."

There was a pause, during which servants brought in a round straw mat and heaped it with sheets of Bedouin bread so thin that it can be folded up like paper. Platters of rice and goat's flesh followed. We ate in silence, using the yeastless bread which was strongly flavoured with wood ash, as spoon and plate combined. When the remains of the meal had been handed over to the retainers, Sultan el Atrash continued: "When speech is fruitless, a man must resort to lead. We saw our country ruled and exploited by strangers, so we cleaned our guns to defend it, but who can battle against aeroplanes and tanks? In the war we lost less than two thousand fighting men, but three thousand two hundred non-combatants, women, little children and the very old who were too blind to see the sights of a rifle, were killed by bombs and shells in undefended villages. And prisoners also were shot down by those who captured them. . . ." A beardless man with a strong square face and a neatly cut moustache broke into the conversation. This was Shekib Bey Wahab, most reckless of all the Druses, with a price on his head and heaven knows how many deaths to his credit. "El Atrash took prisoner a French Lieutenant," he said, "and wherever he was taken in the retreat through the mountain, Sultan Pasha ordered that the house in which he lodged should be marked with a white cross so that the French aeroplanes might

not bomb it. Word of this was sent to our enemies, but they killed our women and our wounded."

"With an Englishman," reflected Sultan el Atrash, "one can talk, because he is ready to listen. But with a Frenchman it is no use, for at once he gets angry. The only argument for him is a bullet."

"Nobody can fight France," I said, and delivered a lecture on the resources of the West, but Sultan was unconvinced.

"After a few months of the war," he said, "France offered us the independence of Jebel Druse, but we replied that we would not make peace till the whole of Syria was united under a national government."

Once again I protested: "But what link is there between you Druses and the cosmopolitan Christians of the coast who are afraid of you and yet think themselves your superiors? Why should you sacrifice yourselves for those who play with politics?"

"We are all Arabs," returned my host, "and we are gradually becoming wiser. We are learning that we must not waste time fighting each other. See, there is even now a treaty between Ibn Saud and King Feisul, which is good, for it strengthens them both. And we are sending our sons to be educated, many of them in Europe and America, so that they may learn Western knowledge. In a generation there will be no difference between us and the men of the coast. We speak the same language and soon we shall all think the same thoughts."

"But meanwhile what are you going to do? You can't live always in this wildness, without crops or flocks." I looked out at the moonlit aridity where one would imagine nothing human or animal could exist.

"We are used to hardship," replied Saya Bey el Atrash, the brother of Sultan. "During the war we slept on stones and ate locusts and at the end, when we were seeking water in the desert, we had to drink the blood of our horses to save us from death."

When his voice ceased, there was no sound in the

great tent but the click of Sultan's beads and the mutter of a rising wind. It was very cold, in spite of the carpets spread over thick white felt and the two-foot wall of hardened sand against which we leaned.

"Ibn Saud has invited us to live in Jof," volunteered el Atrash at last, "but the town is poor after the long war with Feisul ed Doweish [a Bedouin Sheikh with whom the Wahabis had just concluded peace]. The people have no bread. They live on locusts and dates. The hospitality of Ibn Saud is famous throughout Arabia, but we cannot be a burden on it. Since the French confiscated our lands and our flocks, the only help we have comes from our friends, many of whom are in America." (During the war with France, American Druses are said to have contributed some £3,000 per month to the help of their heroic compatriots.)

The conversation turned on Palestine. "We have a saying," said el Atrash, "that, when a Sheikh dies, his friendships die with him (meaning that the tribe is free to make new alliances), so when your Lord Balfour died, we hoped his foolish promise might die with him."

"He did not understand," I said, and told the company how, when Balfour had first visited Palestine, he asked: "Who are these men in brown cloaks?" and when informed they were Arabs, voiced his surprise: "But are there many Arabs in Palestine?"

For the first time that night, Sultan smiled. "Mashallah, if your statesmen are so ignorant, how can you expect us to be wise? We fight because it seems to us the only way to help our country, which we see suffering. We would welcome you, whether French or British, if you would fulfil the promises made to us when we fought by your side against the Turks, but since we helped you win the victory, nothing good has come to us. Our country is divided and, by artifice" (he meant by unnatural frontiers, a multiplicity of customs, passport difficulties and police regulations) "you try to set one people against another,

but they are all Arabs. To-day we are poor and we have nothing left but our love of freedom, but bad things do not stay for ever. Insha-Allah, we shall some day win back our own. Meanwhile you are our guest and there is a saying among the Druses: 'The host is the prisoner of his guests.'"

With grave dignity the exiles took leave of us and we were left with the bitter reminder that patriot and revolutionary are synonymous terms in post-war Arabia. My last speech that night was with a little Druse girl aged twenty-three, the mother of two boys whom she had not seen during five years of exile. She watched me while I prepared to sleep in the inner hut of Saya el Atrash, on his own couch I suspect. "Tell me," she said wistfully, "why do your people make war on women? It is against our custom, but the Ifrangi" (general term for Europeans) "are not civilized. Wherever they go, there is murder and, Allah forbid it, but I may never see my sons again. They were too small to take with us when we fled without water or food, and now the French have made us outlaws in this desert where there is neither comfort nor safety."

"All could go back except Sultan Pasha and some few others." I mentioned the proscribed leaders of what the Druses imagined was a Holy War, destined to free the Arab countries from an alien domination.

The girl, who was so pale and thin that she looked like a little ghost, retorted with sudden spirit: "We do not desert our own people. How can some go back and leave others in the desert?"

CHAPTER V

THE LAND PROBLEM IN PALESTINE

THERE are two Palestines, one Jewish and one Arab. They represent East and West and whether "the twain shall meet" is likely to be a matter concerning the next generation. At present, they are far apart.

It might be possible to find a solution if the Arabs and their sympathizers could realize the hold Zionism has on the world of Jewry. It is an inspiration stronger than nationalism or religion. It makes apostles out of ordinary working men earning comfortable livings in cities where there is every modern convenience.

For instance, when I left Trans-Jordan for the too much promised land sacred to the world's three greatest faiths, it happened that I was driven by a young Jew. He was small and delicate. His clothes were very shabby and he had no overcoat, though the wind was like a knife. He told me that he had been a student in Prague and that had he stayed there, he could eventually have earned several hundred a year in the electrical works where his father was already employed. In Palestine he just managed to keep body and soul together, for the competition is rendered excessive by constant immigration.

"Are you happy here?" I asked.

"How should I not be?" he replied. "It is the land of Israel," and his eyes held the light which the fishermen of Judæa would have recognized nearly two thousand years ago.

No appeal of logic or justice, no criticism, hardship or ill-treatment, not martyrdom itself, can prevail

against that particular spirit. The Arabs must realize the force against which they are fighting. It is backed by the wealth of the world, with a consequent political power no government can afford to ignore, but it is not wholly material. In Palestine to-day there are old Jews working on the land, driving a team of horses behind the plough, when, as professors or lawyers, they might be earning middle-class luxury in a capital of Central Europe.

All over Palestine I searched for an East End Jew and at last I found him among the orange groves at Rahovat. He had been a furrier in the Mile End Road and had worked up from a barrow, where he sold bits of glued rabbit and hare, to a shop with two assistants, but unlike the majority of his contemporaries, for there are very few English Jews in Palestine, his mind was fixed on *Eretz Israel*. It happened that his shop was burned and with the insurance money he was able to transplant his family to Judæa. He bought three acres and planted fruit trees, but a plague of locusts destroyed his first crop. So he pledged his land and started again, adding a few cows whose milk he sold in the neighbouring town. By dint of working from four a.m., when the dairy first needed his attentions, till long after sunset, when the last locusts bunched themselves for the night, he contrived to make both ends meet, but he had no pleasures whatever. He told me that he missed the lights of the Mile End Road and the company of the moving crowds. When he shut his eyes he saw the friendly flares sputtering over the barrows on Saturday nights, but it never occurred to him to go back.

"When I was a young man," he said, "I used to go to Zionist meetings in an attic in Whitechapel, and like as not we'd find a notice to say the rent was unpaid. There we'd be with our coats buttoned up because we hadn't any shirts and nothing in our pockets but the price of the next meal, but we'd turn them out to satisfy the landlord and go hungry, for those meetings were a lot more important to us than food."

In Palestine, the average Arab regards the advent of foreign-speaking aliens much as he does the plague of locusts which lay bare his land. To his slow-moving mind he is being exploited for the benefit of Europeans who have no right to the country which has belonged to him for so many hundred years that he has forgotten the need for title-deeds. Actually he is being slowly beggared by the inevitable forces of modernity, but to the Arab peasant, unchanged since the days of Abraham, it is the mills of Zionism, not of science, in which he is being ground.

I repeat that a solution is impossible till the Arab realizes the nature of the force which has developed and transformed the Jewish zone. It represents progress as surely as it does the slow foundation of a state which may influence conditions and politics throughout the Middle East. But no solution is feasible until the Zionists get down to hard facts and recognize that all Palestinians must be equally protected by the machinery of government. In spite of conflicting promises, the situation is not hopeless, if Zionism which is some thousand years ahead of Islam and therefore surely capable of facing, sanely and practically, the unprecedented difficulties of the situation—would realize how much harm the present policy is doing to the Arab inhabitants of Palestine. It happened that within the last few days I was talking to the wife of a great Zionist, who has given much of his time, personality and fortune to the foundation of a Jewish Palestine, and I was dumbfounded when, with the utmost sincerity, she affirmed that "the Arabs are better off to-day than they have ever been." It is this ignorance of the basic conditions of Palestinian, in fact of Middle Eastern life, which contributes to what is significantly known in Arabia as "the Mandate muddle."

I have met so many Zionists in Jerusalem, as in London, who are genuinely incapable of believing that the Arab has any wrongs at all, yet one Commission after another puts its finger with unerring precision on the weak spot in our administration of a country

wherein we are pledged to protect the rights of all nationalities.

The Hope-Simpson and the Shaw Commissions were quick to realize that the political events of the last decade have placed the Arab cultivators in an unprecedented position and one from which there appears to be no hope of escape without drastic government intervention, and this in spite of the fact that Zionism has the brains of the world at its disposal, whereas the Arab has neither money, education, political importance or even a knowledge of the language in which he must present his case. In every sense of the word he must speak through an interpreter.

The Commissions might have stated that a landless class has already been created rather than is "in danger of being created," for contemporary Palestine is the only country in the civilized world where tenants can be summarily evicted without compensation.

Under the Turks, Palestine, so far as the agricultural labourer was concerned, represented the ideal for which Socialist Governments strive. Each man cultivated his own acres, which he held by traditional right more often than by deed, or by a lease which guaranteed him against eviction in case of a change of landlord. Thus when the Turkish Government granted certain lands in Esdraelon to the Syrian Sursok family in redemption of a loan, a special clause was inserted guaranteeing the rights of the existing cultivators, but when these lands were re-sold to the Zionists, no protection was afforded to the Arab small-holders who had lived upon them for generations and considered them their own.

Six thousand Arabs were consequently evicted from the plain of Esdraelon with only a few pounds in the way of compensation. Their landlord received fair payment for his property, but the tenants, unable to produce certified leases or tax returns for the last ten years—what Arab has ever been known to keep a paper so long?—were deprived of their sole means of livelihood.

Government officials cheerfully remark: "Of course, they've been absorbed into other villages." But this is impossible, for there is no hired agricultural labour in Arab Palestine. There, farming is a one-man job. Each villager scrapes the surface of his own land with implements fashionable in the days of Abraham, and with the help of his own family, the women working about three times as hard as the men. Where therefore can the penniless and landless Arab evicted from his tenant farm find work? A few secure it on the roads where the average pay for Arab labour is four piastres (five piastres = one shilling) a day for a woman and seven to eleven piastres for a man. A very few are employed on the prosperous and well-run Jewish fruit farms, but in the new Zionist Colonies hired labour is not allowed. The small-holders and co-operative farmers work their own land, though in the latter case, machinery is shared and products are pooled for marketing. The still more advanced communal groups own no personal property, and arrange the rotation of labour by which their intensive modern farming is carried on, by weekly committee.

Among none of these can the dispossessed Arab find employment any more than among his own impoverished compatriots. Where he does eventually become "absorbed" is in the prison camps which have increased to an alarming extent since the wholesale transference of land from an avowedly lazy and backward race to an eminently progressive people who are developing their new possessions to the utmost possible extent. In the vicinity of Haifa alone there are three such camps harbouring a total of 1,600 prisoners, nearly all of whom once owned and tilled their own land. Deprived of it, they had no alternative but to starve or to steal.

Under the Turks, taxation was light and irregularly collected. It is now very heavy.

There was also an Ottoman Agricultural Bank which lent money to the peasant farmer at rates varying from six per cent. to nine per cent. This institution was closed

by the British Government and the loans called in at a moment when, owing to a series of bad harvests and the decrease of live-stock during the war, it was impossible for the Arabs to pay. They were forced to sell their land in a falling market or, worse still, into the hands of money-lenders. These local vultures appear to be more rapacious in Palestine than in any other country, for they charge a hundred per cent. for a three months' loan. If at the end of that period the debtor cannot pay, the interest is doubled so that it becomes three hundred per cent. for six months, or six hundred per cent. for a year. Once in their clutches, the farmer can never free himself and his only resource is to sell his land.

The purchaser is invariably a Jew, or the Zionist fund which provides £40,000 a month for the acquisition of inalienable land; and a very fair price, ranging from £3 to £10 or even £20 an acre is paid, but it is not the Arab vendor who gets the money. It all goes to the money-lender and a destitute family is left to beg, borrow or steal for the right to exist.

A new Agricultural Bank is, I believe, one of the measures projected for the relief of farming, but it will not suffice to remedy the present unpalatable situation unless rigorous measures are taken for the suppression or regulation of money-lenders. In Rhodesia, I am told, the government at one time bought up all outstanding native debts to money-lenders at a reasonable rate of interest and allowed the debtors to repay the principal slowly, with interest at nine per cent. per annum. If this could be done in Palestine, it would free the Arabs from the worst tyranny they have suffered since the days of El Jezrani, the Butcher.

Palestine is one of the few countries in the world where the possession of money does not necessarily mean a living, for there is no suitable industry in which the Arab can invest any small capital which he may be able to save from the usurer. He doesn't know what to do with a lump sum. Possibly he receives £500

for the sale of thirty to fifty acres, but he cannot support his family on the interest without house or land. Fatuously amused at the possession of so much wealth, he buys a new wife, or a new horse. The money disappears in a year or two, and depending as he has always done on the land for a permanent living, he is at a loss for means of existence.

The Zionists claim that they have a right to the best land, not only because they are ready to pay a good price for it, but because they are capable of increasing its production. Such claim would be more than justified, for Jewish Palestine is a proof of what unlimited wealth backed by all the resources of science and devoted personal labour can do to develop a long neglected country, if government regulations prevented the eviction of existing tenants.

Naturally, such an arrangement would retard the Zionist programme, for the Arab is still Biblical in his methods, and content with very little, he sees no reason for working harder than is strictly necessary, but so far nothing whatsoever has been done to check the formation of a landless Arab class and the unparalleled increase of crime for which it is inevitably responsible, since man must eat to live and if he has no land to provide his food he must pay for what he eats.

At a period when Jewish emigration was admittedly excessive, the government set aside £100,000 of the taxpayers' money for the relief of Jewish unemployment, but with the exception of a small sum subscribed privately by the Red Crescent, nothing has been done for the thousands of local Arabs who are in a worse condition.

The formation of an Agricultural Bank would help the country people, if they could first be freed from the thrall of the money-lender, but the townsfolk are inevitably being forced out of their small trades and businesses by the competition of, admittedly, far superior Jewish shopkeepers and manufacturers. The work that used to be done by Arabs is being given to Jews

because they are more capable and more reliable, but there remains the fact that Arab Palestine has never been so poor. The townsfolk, endangered by a flood of new competitors and by the poverty of their country neighbours, are further affected by the well-known lack of unity and organization among their compatriots, for though a Jew will naturally always give preference to his own people, the Arab is quite willing to deal with his rival at the expense of his own race.

From 1921 to 1927, £884,698 was spent by the Karen Hayesod (Jewish Foundation Fund) on its agricultural settlements and its experimental station, yet according to the report of the American Commission, none of the new Zionist Colonies are, or can be self-supporting, because they have insufficient acreage per head. Certainly those which show a profit on paper have not yet paid any interest on their capital, or any amortization. There are perhaps some six thousand Jews in these new agricultural colonies, of which the communal ones are doing the best, but between 1921 and 1927 alone, 94,029 Jewish emigrants entered Palestine. Therefore, it would seem that the hardest pressure is likely to be felt by the Arab town-dweller, who is faced with the figure of £238,722 spent in those years by the Karen Hayesod on urban colonization.

Nevertheless the primal question in Palestine to-day is that which concerns the land. The Zionists must buy in order to show reason for further emigration. The Arab must sell because he owes money. If a big concession is granted, or an overlease sold, he is evicted with inadequate compensation. As he becomes landless, he becomes lawless and the whole community suffers.

Nothing can stem the force which is fertilizing and developing every inch of the new Zionist Palestine and which, in ten years, raised Tel Aviv from a straggling suburb of Jaffa to a prosperous modern town with a population of nearly fifty thousand, but if the work of political agitators on both sides is not to be made

easier by the existence of a discontented, dispossessed class, dangerous to all elements in the community, protection must be given to the original Arab cultivators who, for hundreds of years, have lived by the soil and know no other means of existence.

The recent Commissions rightly advocated the control of emigration until or unless new resources are discovered and until relief can be afforded to the primitive indigenous countryman who, at present, is but flotsam on the stream of Zionist progress. That such a stream develops the material resources of the country is undeniable, but it should be possible to direct it for the benefit of Arabs as well as Jews and with very few exceptions, this is not the case at present.

CHAPTER VI

JEWISH COMMUNAL COLONIES IN PALESTINE

PALESTINE, at the moment, is a curious conglomeration not only of every race, but of all centuries and all stages of human development. It is the supreme anomaly of religious and social history.

Fortunately the nightmare of divergent purposes is relieved by one object of supreme beauty, the blue Mosque of Omar.

Within its courts there is a spurious peace. Olives, coeval with Gethsemane, are etched against the stones which time has stippled with faint gold. The colour of the dome suggests a sapphire reflected in a tropical sea.

Here, the women walk with veils thrown back. Splashes of orange and terra-cotta resolve themselves into children playing with fragments of marble. Towards sunset, when the precincts are closed to unbelievers, it is possible, within those walls, to forget a Jerusalem distraught by creeds and politics, by trippers and pilgrims, Zionists, nationalists, and harassed British officials, and to visualize an older world. Solomon had no greater glory than the poppies staining with their crimson the courts of Omar's mosque. Herod and Cleopatra, Christ, Mohamed and the Queen of Sheba saw the silhouettes of burdened donkeys on the Mount of Olives. The music throbbing in the old town re-echoes, through the ages, the clamour of Menelik's departure or the advent of a Roman Governor.

But, barely a mile away, through the labyrinth of the markets, where the Bible and the Koran are trans-

lated into human flesh by the curled ringlets of Judah cheek by jowl with the kufiyas of Islam, there are American hotels with ice-cream fountains and cafeterias. Central Europe is represented in shops and eating-houses. Russia has its lodgings and its distinctive speech. So the turbans and the ringlets, which understood each other without too much difficulty for a little matter of a thousand years or so, are forced apart by the bowler and the Stetson felt. The young Jews from the Ukraine, from Prague and Bucharest and Tiflis, pride themselves on speaking nothing but Hebrew, which is their initial mistake, for they are going to live in the middle of an Arab country, wherein, before the Balfour Declaration, everyone, whether Jew or Moslem, spoke the local Arabic.

On the hills of Moab, the desert tribes pasture their herds in summer. The black tents, which sheltered Abraham and Sarah are pitched among the goats. Camels, like tortoises on stilts, sway across the horizon. In this nomadic and patriarchal world, Joseph still wears his coat of many colours, Ishmael is still cast out from the tribe he dishonours. From Moab to the coast is a matter of a few hours in an American car, but there is a gap of as many centuries between the Bedouins camped above the Dead Sea and the polyglot members of the Arab Executive with offices furnished *d'après* Maple and clothes sponsored by the U.S.A.

There is an equal distance in time and evolution between the old indigenous Hebrew, who differed only in religion from his Arab neighbours, and the young free-thinking Zionists intent on creating in the land of Israel exact reproductions of the most modern and sometimes the most iconoclastic elements in the states that gave them birth.

Tel Aviv is a monument to Zionist enterprise. It is also an exceedingly agreeable city, with the planning and architecture of provincial America, the night life of Central Europe, the politics of Russia and the amenities of any Latin university. If there is a syna-

gogue, it is as little connected with the general life of the town as is the mosque at Angora with the evolution of modern Turkey.

Years ago, a great Jewish banker voiced his conviction that Jewry was a religion, not a nationality; but in the Palestine of Zionism, science has taken the place of the Talmud and, as in Russia, the University is the recognized place of worship. In little more than a decade, Zionism has extended the frontiers of the Occident to include coastal Palestine, which is now as intensively productive as any recently exploited stretch of the American Middle West, but all the money poured into the country, all the brains and labour expended on its development, have done nothing to benefit the majority of the original inhabitants, who are still living in the days of Isaiah. Consequently, Palestine is divided between the two extremes represented, let us say, by the harem and the communal colony. Superstition and science are equally represented. In neighbouring villages, psycho-therapy and the tears of a female donkey collected at moonrise may be regarded as cures for the same ill.

Palestine is rent by experimental interpretations of a Mandate described to me by Lord Balfour as "a poetic idea," and while Whitehall puts the friendship of world Jewry, involving as it does the finance on which she is dependent, before the good opinion of the 115 million Moslems, who constitute over twenty-five per cent. of the total population of our Empire, it is probable that the experiments will continue. As a result, every five years or so, there will be an Arab revolt, for the indigenous Moslem is terrified of an authority which works in the dark. Extortion and tyranny he understands. Bribery he would accept as a matter of course, but deliberate disappropriation under the guise of law is beyond him. Against it, since he cannot make himself heard in another mental hemisphere where Whitehall, concerned with political and financial expediency, is unaffected by reports of Commissions or individual authorities,

his only resort is "battle, murder and sudden death."

Meanwhile, the most interesting of the many experiments instituted by Zionism on the fertile coastal plain or in the rich valley of Esdraelon is the communal colony which generally farms from five hundred to a thousand acres and is staffed by twenty to thirty-five families. There are, in Jewish Palestine, three kinds of new agricultural colonies, housing a total population of some six thousand. The least successful are the small-holdings which resemble the better-class Arab villages, for each household scrapes along on what its united efforts can produce. Unable to afford intensive farming, such old-fashioned families generally content themselves with producing a small quantity of cereals in addition to the supplies needed for their own consumption.

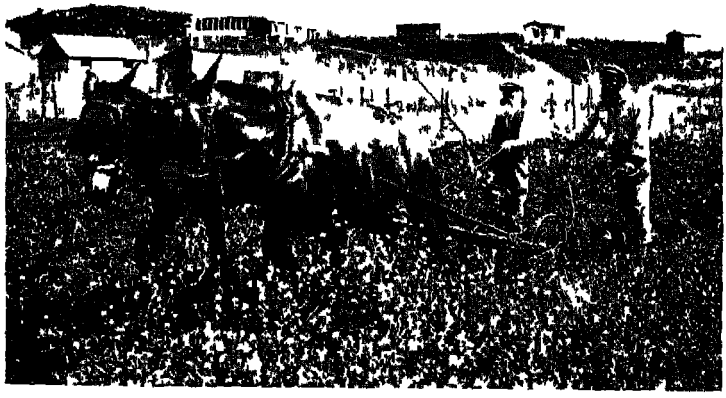
Above them, in order of production, come the co-operative colonies, where each man farms his own land, but machinery and draught animals are shared and produce is pooled for market. In these, as in the communal groups, no hired labour is employed.

The most prosperous colonies are undoubtedly those which are run on definitely communal lines. The system varies in details but not in its aim, which is to extract the maximum wealth from the soil by the organized labour of a carefully selected community, each member of which is entitled to a share in the profits.

At Dilbh, which in Hebrew is Kiriat Anabim, "City of the Grapes," there are 120 inhabitants, including some thirty-five couples who have taken each other for better or for worse, but not always according to the ordinance of holy matrimony.

I first visited this colony five or six years ago and found a number of enthusiastic and highly educated young people, all from the Ukraine, living in the utmost simplicity, in long wooden huts which served as living-room, kitchen and dormitories. As a result

ZIONIST COMMUNAL COLONISTS BUILDING A HOUSE AT DILBIH NEAR JERUSALEM



ORTHODOX JEWS PLOUGHING IN ESDRAELON

of incessant hard work, they have to-day achieved a series of pleasant yellow-washed houses with tiled roofs, each containing four to six rooms. These are consigned to the married couples, or rather to those couples who have signified at the weekly meeting that they intend thenceforth to live together, for there is no Rabbi and no Synagogue in a communal colony and youth pays little heed to formalities it considers old-fashioned.

The unmarried men and girls sleep in dormitories not so unlike the wooden huts of five years ago. Spartan simplicity reigns on every hand. In the single room devoted to a couple there are no pictures and no ornaments, probably no carpet and no curtains. The furniture consists of two narrow iron bedsteads, a table, two chairs, and the simplest washing apparatus, but there are sure to be flowers.

The men wear Russian blouses buttoned on the shoulders, and any old trousers. While at work in the hen-house or dairy, gardening, cleaning, bee-keeping, or tending the vines for which Dilbh is famous, the women wear wide black bloomers, sandals and a sweater. Legs, arms and curly dark hair are bare to the sun. In their few leisure hours they change this practical but unæsthetic garb for straight, dark, one-piece frocks, generally worn with a checked print overall, but I saw no effort at personal adornment, no powder or paint, and not a single piece of jewellery.

The men average eleven working hours a day and the women eight. Between them they cultivate five hundred acres, half of which is good land and half sterile mountain soil. There are terraces of fruit trees and an attempt is being made at afforestation, but outside the famous table-grapes, from which the colony derives its name, its chief sources of wealth are white Leghorns and cattle of a crossed Friesland and Syrian stock. At the moment, Dilbh "exports" to Jerusalem a thousand litres of milk and four hundred eggs a day.

All the work is done in rotation and it is apportioned at the Saturday general meeting, at which men and women have an equal voice. In the communal colonies, stress is laid on complete equality between the sexes and everything possible is done to free the women from unnecessary domesticity. The children spend the day in a communal crêche or kindergarten according to their ages, where they are looked after by specially selected young women who do not rotate with the rest from one job to another, and they all appear immensely happy, healthy and intelligent. At night the parents take them back to sleep with them, and on the Saturday holidays they go out in family groups, but obviously some form of birth-control is practised, because it is very rare to find a couple with more than one child.

Four women run the communal kitchen and bakery. Others take their turn in the laundry. When I last visited Dilbh it was in the process of cleaning for the Passover feast, and everyone was working overtime. It struck me as a gallant life but a very hard one, and one which took heaviest toll of the women, who appear to age prematurely.

When they started the colony eight years ago, they were all unmarried. Belonging to the same Socialist organization in the Ukraine, they decided, in spite of parental opposition, to emigrate to what they regard as a national rather than a religious home (for they are all free-thinkers), and to create something enduringly Hebrew out of Hebrew soil.

Their whole life is an utter negation of the necessity for either mental or physical luxury. At first they had meat only once a week. Now they can afford it three times, but the rest of their meals consist chiefly of bread, milk, vegetables and pastes made of flour and water. They drink no wine and they work 310 days out of the year. All that they make goes back into the land, or is devoted to the children whose house is by far the nicest in the colony. Here there are simple toys shared by all alike, gay drawings on the walls,

models in coloured plasticine, charming toy furniture, home-made and covered with white oil-cloth. Everything is bright and spotless, from the white muslin curtains fluttering against the open windows to the row of shiny white baths which sturdy babes regard as the greatest joke of the day.

Dilbh has no currency, for nobody earns or disposes of any money. It is part of the women's work to keep the general store supplied with simple garments and there is an adequate bootmaker among the men. Anybody who wants new clothing states his or her need at the Saturday meeting and is given an order on the store.

Ain Herod is, I believe, the largest communal colony, for it comprises a population of approximately 250, and farms three thousand acres. Here the children are put into the central crêche at the age of seven days and here they remain for a year and a half, after which they progress through a series of kindergartens, each one a separate house made of unpainted deal planks, but always cheerful with pictures and toys, until they reach school age. Fathers and mothers are allowed to take them out between five and seven each evening and for the whole day on Saturdays, but otherwise the children have a world of their own in which, as soon as they are able to talk, they are encouraged to think for themselves and to work for the community. At thirteen, a boy or a girl is admitted a member of the colony and the occasion marked by a feast, but long before that the children begin work on the land. Their houses are situated in the loveliest bit of the colony—the tree nursery—where masses of mimosa and eucalyptus have been planted.

Ain Herod boasts an excellent library, where Galsworthy is the most popular novelist and war books have no success at all. "We are not interested in fighting," one of the workers told me, leaning against a table covered with white oil-cloth in the communal dining-room, whose whitewashed walls are hung with modern drawings representing the scope and triumph

of labour, with wind, temperature and moisture charts, with lists of work-distribution and the findings of Courts of Honour. "We mean to make something good here for our children to take on after us. No, we don't want a synagogue. Dr. Weizmann himself said that Zionism must be a-religious. The new Hebrew University is our synagogue, and in the library here, we read Freud, Proust and Karl Marx, Einstein of course, though we don't always understand him, Wells, Ludwig and Pirandello."

"But don't you miss the mental stimulus of college and city life?" I asked the thin and earnest young man in dungarees.

"No. We're awfully keen on science, but all this culture Europe makes such a fuss over is a matter of hair-splitting. We've got beyond it. You see," smiling, "we've got a superiority complex." He told me how the colony bootmaker was apt to sing Schubert and Schumann while he worked most of the night, with a boy accompanying him on a zither.

Each year Ain Harod elects a committee to organize its work and on this men and women are equally represented. Five judges are also elected, annually, to preside at the Courts of Honour, and of these, two at least must be women. Punishment is in the form of censure, a term of the more disagreeable labour, exclusion from the library, lectures, the communal room, or from any particular group. By a unanimous verdict the offender can be exiled from the colony.

Every worker has the right to bring his parents to live in the colony, and in most cases there is a special building called "The Parents' House," for these older Jews are orthodox with regard to food and religious observances, so they live their own life apart from their thoroughly modern offspring on whose labour they depend for food and lodging.

Sometimes the young people build a synagogue for their elders in the same spirit that they build them a kitchen and a dining-room, wherein is banned all that does not part the hoof and chew the cud, but they

themselves are too busy with this life to think about the problematical next. Sometimes, when a child is expected, they inscribe their union in the nearest Rabbinical book, but their hard-working communal life, healthy and natural, has robbed sex of prudery, mystery and chivalry. Men and women are comrades.

Half a dozen boys and a couple of girls may have travelled half over Europe together, inspired by a vision of Israel, and when they achieve their purpose they are not going to separate because of convention. At Beit Alpha, which is regarded as the most advanced colony, boys and girls used to sleep in the same dormitories, and when it was decided to discontinue this practice, one sturdy young pioneer left, declaring with indignation that she was against such "ridiculous reactionary propaganda." In fact, the communal colony of Zionism has established a new and simple relationship between the sexes and it has made a bold attempt to give woman the same interests and opportunities as man. The tyranny of range and mangle is at an end. The terror of sexual ignorance has been eliminated with the burden and the muddle of exclusive domesticity.

Whether the communal farm will ever be a financial success remains to be seen, for so far no interest or amortization has been paid on the original capital provided by the Zionist organization, and further sums have been advanced for development. Consequently, none of the colonies can be said to be self-supporting, but all the workers seemed to me to be self-reliant and self-sufficient. Deliberately they had set themselves to plough a particularly hard row and they were not going to turn back. Neither were they going to offer any explanation or allow any sympathy. As I have said, it is a gallant life. It is also a serious attempt to evolve a new order of human existence, wherein profit and labour shall be equalized, irrespective of mental or physical qualifications.

CHAPTER VII

IRAQ AND THE HOLY CITIES OF SHIA ISLAM

FROM Palestine and Syria I motored across the desert to Baghdad.

When Nairn first established his service, transport by it was something of an adventure. There were no signposts and no tracks. The Bedouins who were persuaded to act as guides generally lost their heads and their sense of direction at the same time. They were not accustomed to going so fast and they found that the desert, familiar enough from the back of a camel, looked quite different when it was flying past a six-cylinder car at forty miles an hour.

I remember the first time I crossed with Nairn; the largest pistol I had ever seen hung conveniently on the windscreen and the driver enlivened the journey with tales of convoys "shot up," before remarking in a cheerful voice that his weapon was unloaded and the ammunition somewhere in the baggage van. Of course, nothing happened, but the pistol reminded us of the chances Nairn took when he set out to make a high road across Arabia. In those days, if anybody wanted to sleep, he rolled himself in a blanket and stretched out on the sand for an hour or two before dawn and if it happened to be winter he froze so that even the hot breakfast sausages, eaten at sunrise, failed to cheer him. But to-day, the desert between Damascus and Baghdad is much less adventurous than Michigan Boulevard in Chicago.

The tracks are clearly marked by an army corps of mechanical transport running Eastward, hustling Eastward, bearing the labels of civilization and all the

doubtful blessings of modernity to peoples who don't yet know what to make of them.

The route is patrolled by armoured cars, French and British. Half-way across there is an hotel disguised as a fort, wherein there is electric light and, I rather think, electric fans. The food is not even tinned, and the "romantic" Bedouin encampments which surround the post are built of petrol cans! Fortunately, the post is garrisoned by Iraq levies who wear scarlet cloaks, and if it happens to be spring, all along the route, scarred by wheels and signposted with empty tins, there will be herds of camels, with long-legged youngsters looking as if some joint had been omitted by mistake. As likely as not, beside the black tents from which bearded nomads have watched the disappearance of the ghazu (raiding party) and the gradual evolution of the road, there will be a patrol drinking coffee, while its maxims provide topic of conversation for half-naked children with amulets tied to their top-knots.

In one direction a lorry full of pilgrims, bearing the scars of last Muharram, may be bound for the Holy Cities where life is changeless and progress a synonym for evil; and in the other a six-wheel Pullman coach be carrying American tourists in a row of arm-chairs and the most illogical luxury to join a Mediterranean cruise.

During the same night, we passed a convoy of motor-trucks bound for the Persian oil-fields, a super-charged and super-upholstered saloon ordered by the Shah of Persia, an aeroplane which had come down and was waiting for a spare part, and a camel caravan laden with corpses for burial in the Holy City, but on this road there is no conflict between East and West. The laws of the nomads still prevail and the camel amiably pulls the lorry out of the mud, or the convoy provides the caravan with much-needed water.

It seemed to me, however, that if there could be no clearer indication of the manner in which the West is gradually impinging on the East than this trans-desert

highway, certainly nothing could better express the conflict which results from the attempted imposition of one set of habits, ambitions and traditional points of view upon another, equally deep-rooted but utterly divergent, than conditions in Mesopotamia to-day.

Iraq, I imagine, must now regard herself and be regarded by the rest of the world as the most successful solution of a Mandate, the term which has given rise to more conflict in the Middle East than any other coined at Versailles, except perhaps Wilson's "self-determination." But in Baghdad just before the Treaty of Alliance was signed, the Nationalists were saying: "Show us one place where England has established herself and which she has subsequently left"; and the most popular proverb in the country to describe a guest who had outstayed his welcome was: "He lingers like English colonization."

Six months previously, a Prime Minister, Abdul Muhsin Bey, who was unique in that he probably possessed the confidence of nine-tenths of the population, had shot himself because he could not reconcile the claims of the extremists with the more conservative policy he believed essential for the country.

The explanation lies in the importance of Iraq to any European government intent on establishing and safeguarding communications with the East. Iraq is as much a key to Asia as was the Suez Canal to India, and it is as essential to British Imperialism as Clapham Junction to the railways of which it is the centre.

We are entering upon an epoch when the air will be as vital to the maintenance of peace as was the sea. Iraq lies across the main air route to India and the East.

Moreover, the Shatt el Arab is the channel by which the Anglo-Persian oil products are shipped to the outer world and it is controlled by Basra.

Kirkuk, in the province of Mosul, is the centre of another oil region to be developed by the Iraq Petroleum Company, but before the wells can be opened,

H M THE KING OF IRAQ

some five hundred miles of pipe-line must be laid to a port in Palestine, probably Haifa.

If the grain-growing provinces are to export their wheat direct to the Mediterranean, a railway should accompany the pipe-line, in which case Iraq will become the main route to Asia and India by land as well as by air. At the present moment, if the capital were forthcoming to complete the hundred and fifty miles of line between Nisibin and Mosul, the Taurus express would reach Baghdad seventy hours after leaving the shores of the Bosphorus.

It will be seen therefore that Iraq only needs capital to consolidate her position as the nucleus of some of the world's biggest oil interests, as the junction of air and land routes all over Central Asia and as the distributing centre of goods going East or West. But Iraq is the key to the politics of the Middle East as well as to its commerce, and three of her neighbours, Turkey, Persia and Arabia, are ruled by dictators.

Hence the necessity of a strong and stable state holding the land between the rivers so that it may form a barrier between the nomads of Central Arabia, the militarism of Turkey and the acquisitiveness of Persia, who has already occupied the province of Arabistan, as Arab in speech, tradition and origin as it is in name.

Iraq, therefore, if she can develop her resources by the help of foreign capital, is likely to play a considerable part in any redistribution of power in the Middle East, but at present she is suffering from the usual financial crisis, which, owing to over-production and the fall in the cost of raw material, is becoming ubiquitous throughout Asia. During the last few years the Iraqis, always optimistic, suddenly realized the possibilities of irrigation, so they rushed to the nearest towns and bought numbers of pumps on credit, hoping to pay for them out of the subsequent crops. But no man had calculated the cost of upkeep, nor could he foresee that the price of grain would slump. Five years ago wheat was selling for two hundred rupees a

ton. By 1930 it had dropped to thirty-seven. Consequently a deficit in the budget is inevitable and the landowners who had increased the area under cultivation by forty per cent. are disillusioned. There is a huge reserve of grain, destined to remain unsold, partly because Russia has come back into the market and is selling at cut-throat prices, and partly because the Iraqi still mixes a certain amount of dirt with his wheat, hoping thereby to increase the weight.

In the North, the Christian and other Minorities are anxiously watching the situation. To put it baldly, they cannot believe that England, on whom they imagine they depend for continued security, intends to abide by a Treaty even if she has signed one.

The Kurds, suffering on one side the pressure of Turkish nationalism, and on the other from the misunderstandings and mismanagement difficult to avoid when there are two governments in one country, are agitating for an independent state, comprising the three separate provinces now ruled respectively by Angora, Tehran and Baghdad.

The Basra Sheikhs, who control large tribal sections and who represent one of the few wealthy elements in Iraq, are inclined to welcome the termination of the Mandate, feeling that they are quite strong enough to evade taxation by an independent Government.

A further problem is represented by the many young Englishmen who accepted posts in Iraq at the end of the War, believing that under the ægis of Whitehall, they were going to create a second Sudan. They had every reason to regard themselves as settled, with a hard task, but one which would repay a lifetime's inconspicuous and uncomplaining labour. The majority of these are now going to be on the unemployed list, because after the rebellion of 1921, the British Government discarded their first interpretation of the word Mandate, which for all practical purposes amounted to colonial administration, and instituted the dual régime. Owing to the tact displayed by H.M. King Feisul and by a series of able High Commissioners,

this curious system has functioned with comparative success, but by the recent Treaty of Alliance between Iraq and England, it is to end in 1932 when the independent Arab state will be recommended for entry into the League of Nations. Thereafter Britain will be present in Iraq only to safeguard the communications which are essential to her imperial entity.

In order that Iraq should be ready for the independence she has obtained by means of years of active negotiations, it was necessary that the system of local government, instituted when Mesopotamia had perhaps less claim to national entity than any other portion of Arabia, should be modified. For instance, during what may be called "Mandatory Interpretation 2," wherever there was a Mutasarif, there was also an English official, so that the former had no urgent reason for learning his job. He need not take any responsibility so long as there was an Englishman whom he could consult. If he happened to be indolent, the Englishman did the work and covered the mistakes of the Iraqi. Such a system shielded the incompetent and did not give the capable a chance. Sooner or later, the local officials have got to learn to govern, and it was felt among the more intelligent nationalists that in order to force them to shoulder the responsibility for their own acts, the Englishmen should gradually be concentrated in the central offices and should make tours of inspection when necessary.

Reorganization on these lines was already beginning in the spring of 1930, and since the Treaty has been signed the majority of British employees are leaving at the end of their contracts, while some, whose posts can already be filled by Iraqis, are being dismissed with compensation. In fact, the individual Englishman who, in the majority of cases, has done splendid work for the country, in whose progress he felt himself personally concerned, is paying with the loss of his job for the changes rung by Whitehall.

Perhaps the sentiments of a country faced with so many problems, racial and religious, political, agri-

cultural and financial, a country which outside the educated classes of three or four towns, is devoid of national unity, are best summarized in the words of the King: "The Iraqi is gradually becoming much less conservative, but his enterprise is limited by political expediency. If suspicion of England could be eradicated, he would get on twice as fast. When the Treaty of Alliance is signed, there will be no more powder for the magazines of our young agitators and they will set to work with agricultural treatises instead of studying the press for signs of Whitehall's intent to colonize!" It seemed to me that His Majesty, who, during a number of difficult years has attempted to reconcile the interests of Iraq and England, realized that for several decades his country would need the services of foreign experts, but since these, in the past, have not always been well chosen, he wished them to be selected and employed by the Iraq rather than the British Government.

Such were the general outlines of the situation in Baghdad, when I set out with a young nationalist, whose spirit was by way of being as Occidental as his clothes, to visit the holy cities of Southern Iraq. My companion was a nephew of Doctor Shahbender, and with his long-suffering uncle, he had been first imprisoned and then banished for the part he played in the movement for Syrian independence. Naturally, he was less interested in the desert—inhabited by a horde of most engaging creatures of the lizard tribe, but so large and fat that, scuttling out of the way of the car, they reminded me of Eryops, the Mud Puppy—than he was in the problematical progress of a united Arabia.

Bumping frantically against the roof and ricochetting from side to side till we found ourselves in an ungainly heap upon the floor, we indulged in spasmodic politics, interspersed with frantic prayers to the driver who suffered from a convenient deafness. By the time the first oasis blurred the horizon with palm trees which stood waist-deep in mirage, I had been informed that in the combined products of Americanized education

and nationalist principles represented by my fluent and elegant companion, East and West had met, irrevocably and for the obvious benefit of Arabia. An hour later, we were stumbling through a street which would have shocked the eugenic principles of Haroun er Rashid. I did not mind the dirt or the sores, or the fanatical hatred of the ultra-religious, because the setting was so picturesque, but my companion held a handkerchief across his mouth and nose. From behind it, he muttered in genuine distress: "Oh, God! And these people believe they are fit to govern themselves!"

For the Shias, Kerbela and Najaf take the place of Mecca and Medina. A pilgrimage to these desert towns, known as Zyaret, the Visit, is as meritorious in the eyes of Persian Islam as the longer and more difficult journey to the Hejaz. The annual number of pilgrims varies between a hundred and fifty thousand and two hundred thousand, and in a prosperous year it may rise to something like three hundred thousand.

Each group has a leader who carries a flag stamped with a text from the Koran, or the names of the twelve Imams, descendants of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, Mohamed. Having purified themselves by the prescribed ablutions, the pilgrims present themselves at the shrine of Husayn, and after begging the Saint's permission to approach, they circle the grave three times and then prostrate themselves to the accompaniment of prayers and lamentations. For, to them, Husayn represents all that was most gallant in the young warrior Islam. He was the son of Fatima, the famous daughter of the Prophet, and Persian legend attributes to him a bride of the Royal Sasanian House, last of the great dynasties to rule in Fars, thus ensuring him a double claim to the veneration of loyal Persians. Invited by the Kufans to proclaim himself Commander of the Faithful in place of the brilliant intriguer, Moawiya, who had already founded the Omeyad Caliphate in Damascus, Husayn marched across the deserts from Mecca with thirty horse and forty foot, including women and children. In the

plain of Kerbela he was met by the hosts of his rival, and deserted by the Kufans, was massacred with every male in his party. It is in memory of this wholesale martyrdom that the Shias keep the first ten days of Muharram as a period of lamentation.

Where Husayn pitched his camp in Kerbela there is now a small mosque approached between a double row of dwarf arches supposed to represent the tents of the butchered warriors. From here the mourners start their annual procession. Armed with axes and other sharp instruments with which they strike themselves on heads and shoulders, they advance, sometimes linked together, intoning a frenzied lament for the death of their Saint.

It is said that the richest treasure in Islam lies under the great golden dome of Husayn's mosque, but, alas, the bazaar huddles so closely round its walls that all the infidel can see of this most famous shrine is a blaze of mosaic through one of the four great doors which open straight into the *suqs*.

Like Gertrude Bell, I climbed on to the roof of a neighbouring house. In the glare and dust of a desert noon, I looked across a wilderness of mud walls to the splendour of Husayn's dome, covered with beaten gold, between minarets of the same precious material, and I remembered her appreciation: "It was the sense of having reached these regions which saw the founding of imperial Islam, regions which remained for many centuries the seat of the paramount ruler, the Commander of the Faithful. Within the compass of a two days' journey lay the battlefield of Kadisiyah, where Khalid ibn u'l Walid overthrew at once and for ever the Sasanian power. Chosroes with his hosts, his satraps, his Arab allies—those princes of the house of Mundhir, whose capital was one of the first cradles of Arab culture—at his coming stepped back into the shadowy past; their cities and palaces faded and disappeared, Kirah, Khawarnak, Ctesiphon and many another of which the very site is forgotten; all the pomp and valour of an earlier time fell together like

an army of dreams at the first trumpet blast of those armies of the Faith which hold the land unto this hour."*

But there is another aspect of Kerbela which must affect the stranger coming from the more progressive towns of Iraq bent on modernization and a place in the League of Nations. Kerbela to-day, is exactly as it was six hundred years ago and so it is likely to remain, for harassed officials assured me that, with the exception of the late Mayor—who was particularly successful in dealing with the obstinate, avaricious and narrow-minded Sayeds claiming descent from Ali and unable to think about anything else—nobody has been able to compete with the intensive holiness of this isolated district for more than a year at a time.

"The virtuous are excessively difficult to argue with," remarked a doctor whose life was made intolerable by the knowledge that in the centre of each beautifully tiled court, round which are built the harem rooms, there is a pool where the water is never renewed, though everything human, animal and culinary is dipped into it in turn.

The high-roofed bazaars of Kerbela are as Persian as its houses; and the slim, hollow-chested figures crouched behind their wares in open-fronted booths are of that Persian type which has the Jewish nose and a smooth, pale, hairless face. There are Persian tiles in the cafés, where Bedouins in checked black-and-white cotton kufiyas, Indians in gold-embroidered caps, Sayeds with rolls of green round their fezes, and the subjects of Reza Shah, forced much against their common sense to wear the Pahlavi hat, an atrocity rather like a railway porter's cap, but excessively stiffened and high-crowned with the peak pointing skywards, drink Persian tea instead of Arab coffee.

There are frescoes representing old Persian stories, on every convenient wall and between the honeycombed booths, heaped with oranges and sweet lemons, with pistachio nuts and the heads of roses, with plaques

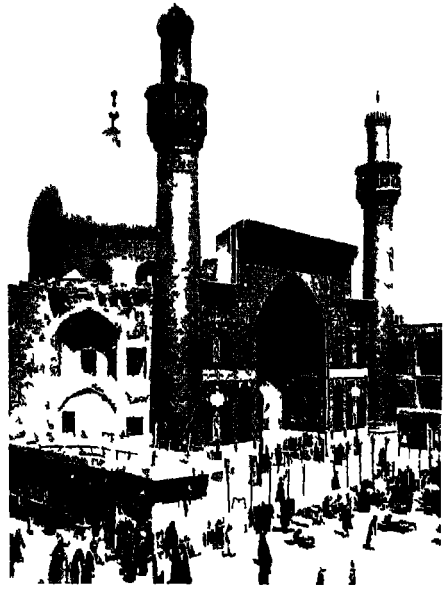
* "Amurath to Amurath," by the late Gertrude Bell, by kind permission of the publishers, Macmillan & Co.

of sacred earth on which the believer presses his head in prayer, with shrouds stamped with texts from the Koran, with sharp-pronged instruments representing the hand of Fatima with which the faithful tear and stab themselves in their frenzy of lamentation, walk Persian ladies under tents of black silk, or cotton, with a wire visor protruding just above the eyes so that, perhaps, they can catch a glimpse of the way they would go.

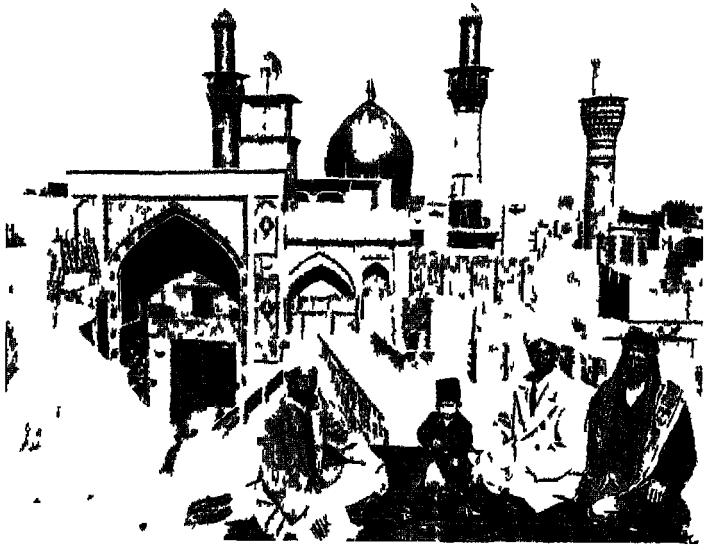
The Arab women show one eye, and the Indians, distinguished by their brilliant silk coverings, grass-green, purple or red, have an inch or two of thick meshing like a grid over the eyes, but they all look like perambulating tents, for nowhere is Islam more repressive to feminine aspiration. In Najaf there are no schools for girls and the *Mujtahids* forbid that any woman should learn to read or write, yet, in both these sacred towns "mutta"—temporary—marriages can be arranged for a night or a month according to the taste of the pilgrim. The "wife" is paid according to the duration of the marriage, which is celebrated by a formal ritual in the presence of witnesses who sign the contract, but no divorce is necessary.

At Najaf, Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, is buried under another golden dome, and one of the attendant minarets, slightly out of the straight, is said to have salaamed in honour of Mohamed, and to have remained pointing reverently in the direction of Meshed, holy city of Persia.

Najaf is the burial-ground of the Shias, and thither, all the year round, are brought the corpses of the faithful in cars, and on camels, horses and donkeys; in baskets, boxes and rolls of reeds, covered with a red cloth; on men's backs and in their luggage, for the government roused a storm of protest by forbidding the import of "wet" corpses, i.e. those which had been dead less than a year. Consequently, the faithful are obliged to smuggle the uncomplaining dead, with apples sewn in their shrouds to hide the odour of decay; but for "dry" corpses there are no restrictions



THE MOSQUE OF ALI AL NAJAF



PILGRIMS TO THE HOLY CITY OF THE SHIAS

and it may be that a man will converse with you in the desert with the remains of his long-dead relative very obviously sticking out of the bundle on his back.

The whole of Najaf lives on the burial trade and as tombs in the holy area are a vested territorial right, families sell space in them for anything from five to a thousand rupees, according to their proximity to the mosque. There is a parking ground for unburied corpses which is always crowded, while the relatives drink tea and smoke water-pipes on acres of narrow wooden couches arranged round a huge earthen stove laden with gaudy china from the Midlands.

The Turkish Government used to charge nine shillings import duty on a corpse and the price of burial was then £40 at Ruwaq in Najaf and only £6 at Samarra, but the *Mujtahids*, known collectively as the *Aatabir*, the Threshold, who have great influence (in spite of the fact that they number over two thousand, only forty-one of whom substantiated their claim in the face of Ottoman inquiry), used to insist on additional fees for their services.

For half an hour's walk outside the walled city of Najaf, which is treeless and set suddenly in the middle of the desert without any cultivation at all, the ground is holy. It is strewn with tombs of every size, the largest adorned with beautiful blue domes, to which the townsfolk refer as the house of so-and-so. In fact they live so habitually among the departed that in the course of the average conversation you never know if your companion is referring to the living or the dead, or whether the dwelling which he enthusiastically describes is somebody's new house or a tomb which, with forethought, a prosperous citizen is preparing for his own, or somebody else's end.

The most interesting thing in Najaf, apart from the distracting glimpses of the mosque obtained from bazaars so narrow that two cannot walk abreast between the shops, is the subterranean city which, during the torrid summer months houses the whole population.

If the brogue of an infidel happens to impinge upon

the first paving-stone of the great, mosaiced gateway by which the court of Ali's mosque is approached, a sullen murmur swells among the crowd. Pale faces crowd round the trespasser and there is age-old hatred in eyes which look as if they were drowned in opium, but the fanatical citizens become quite amiable when asked to show their underground retreats.

Preceded by a lantern, I went down an old well shaft into what appeared to be the heart of the earth, and there were great columned apartments, still warm from the sun-baked streets. Further down we went and the chambers were cooler and low-roofed, some with tiled or frescoed walls, and then down again till we were five stories under the earth and in a temperate climate.

From one house to another stretch the suites of underground rooms, with here and there a cavern or an ancient well, called "the home of a wind," up which a breeze blows strong and cold. With the first summer heat, carpets, tea-things and water-pipes are brought down to the subterranean houses, with bedding for those storm-swept nights when the flying sand makes sleep on the roofs impossible. And, as the temperature increases in the desert leaguered town, the people of Najaf merely move one story deeper into the earth.

CHAPTER VIII

PERSIA OF THE OIL-FIELDS

BETWEEN Najaf and Basra I had plenty of time to meditate on the preface to Persia represented by the holy cities of the Shias, but when I reached Abadan, which is American in its town planning and its general outlook, as well as in its efficiency, publicity, electrical comfort and lack of individual domesticity, I wondered if the preface were out of date.

It is probable that Islam and Oil are likely to prove the two salient factors in the history of Persia, but which will have the most enduring effect on the mental and political development of the country it is hard to decide.

There never was a religion more unsuited to the character of a nation than Islam to the Persians. Forcibly converted from Zoroastrianism in the seventh century by the Arab invasion, under Khalid ibn u'l Walid, the subtle and philosophical Iranians promptly invented the Shia heresy to satisfy their need for poetry and romance. The educated Persian is nearly always acting a part and he does it very well, but when it comes to celebrating the martyrdom of Husayn, he surpasses himself. For a month he can give free rein to his dramatic talent, with the result that he is capable of enduring the comparative rigours of his modified version of Islam for the rest of the year.

It has often been said that the Shah's greatest achievement is his victory over the Mullahs, but it must be remembered that whereas other Moslem countries have known no major schisms since the institution of Islam, Persia has suffered one frightful religious persecution after another, culminating in the unspeakable tortures inflicted on the Babis between

1848 and 1910. Islam was too material a creed to satisfy the Iranian. From its intolerance he took refuge in the mysticism of the Sufis.

The Bab was but one "gate," through which the intellectual Persian hoped to escape to a less circumscribed world. Among the great thinkers of the last century, before Persia had discovered her material treasure, metaphysics took the place of Islam. The poets and philosophers of Iran's golden age found their inspiration outside the Koran, and in consequence, many of them were persecuted into silence.

When Reza Shah destroyed the power of the Mullahs, he won a battle against traditional superstition, but not against the inherent convictions of a people dependent on and satisfied by their religion. Islam has never encouraged the spiritual, or even the material advancement of a race, except by the sword, and this is clearly seen in Persia, where nearly all business is in the hands of Jews, Armenian Christians and Zoroastrians.

The young educated Persians are free-thinkers, because Islam, with its artificial restrictions, has no hold on their imagination. In the past, the narrow interpretation of what, after all, was at the moment of the *Hegira* one of the greatest spiritual revelations vouchsafed to mankind, checked the spontaneous evolution of the Persian we know in the poems of Firdusi and of Hafiz.

Contemporary Islam refuses the position in the vanguard of progress which every national church should assume. It lingers in the unsanitary holy places, claiming through the mouths of the untravelled and the ill-educated that any departure from a tradition now purposeless and sterile is mortal sin.

Consequently, the young Persian, too much occupied with the modern struggle for existence to find comfort in the experimental philosophies of his forbears, is frankly agnostic. He believes in Oil and the Shah. In exceptional cases he believes in himself, but he has not yet learned to have any confidence in his fellows.

If nationalism is taking the place of religion, it is based on the belief that the material wealth of Persia, as represented by an unlimited supply of oil, precludes the necessity for spiritual treasure. What miracles have been and are being enacted in the name of oil, but what follies will doubtless follow, for the Persia which embraced the Shia tariq to save her from the unpalatable realism of Islam defends her chauvinistic isolation on the grounds of unlimited natural wealth. To her still, unsophisticated statesmen and students, ignorant of world economics, on a sea of oil may float a structure of nationalism independent of Russia or England.

So, from Kerbela and Najaf, holy cities of Islam, I came to another sacred place. Here, too, are minarets piercing the skies, and clusters of inverted bowls that might well be the domes of mosques. Only in this case the minarets are steel-plated chimneys, the lances of commerce rather than of faith, and the mosques are tanks with a cubic capacity of two and a half million gallons and a diameter of a hundred and sixteen feet. One inch of petrol out of any of these monsters would send a car, running twenty-five miles to the gallon, five times round the world. A similar inch of kerosene would keep forty thousand lamps burning for twenty-four hours, or one alight for a hundred years. These are the sort of figures they juggle with in spare moments at Abadan.

This holy city of oil stands on a desert island between the Shatt el Arab and the Barmeshir. On one side of the sluggish brown water is a forest of date palms, on the other a growing Manchester, or Birmingham, or Leeds, only it is an American version of such an industrial town. Like the newest cities in the States, it is still unfinished. Its admirably planned parallelogram ends in the desert, where the numbered streets pause to take breath and to watch the construction of further houses, which will, in due course, become numbers one hundred and something on other rectangular highways.

America lives by the motto "Scrap it. Buy

another"; and it cares not at all whether the material scrapped be human or mechanical, but the salvage yards of Abadan are like the housewife's bottom drawer. Nothing new is ordered until it is certain that the parts, or raw material required are not to be found among the mass of machinery temporarily discarded within a seven-foot fence.

The organization of Abadan allows for no waste in human material. The Persian Oil Company employs some 14,500 Orientals, Persians, Hindus, Burmans, Parsees, Chittagonians, Arabs from the Gulf and others from Mesopotamia, but preference is naturally given to the local inhabitants. The number of Indians employed as clerks and as expert technical workers is yearly decreasing, though many of these men have been brought up on the Burma oil-fields and have inherited their knowledge from fathers in the same service. Their places are being filled by Persians, but there is some difficulty in inducing well-educated youths to leave the towns, where they can interest themselves in philosophy and politics, for a climate which they find intolerable and a life which they imagine monotonous.

The simplest local labour is paid at the rate of 1s. 6d. a day, but wages vary according to the cost of living, which is at present approximately eighty-five Krans (a Kran = 4d.) a month. Skilled workers, such as carpenters and riveters, can earn eighteen Krans a day, and clerks up to 1,500 Krans a month. After some years they are given free accommodation for their families and settle down in quarters, each of which consists of three rooms and a tiny harem yard. Persians and Indians have their own clubs with excellent tennis-courts and sports sections.

Six hundred British are employed at Abadan, and they inhabit the rows of solidly-built yellow bungalows, each staring into its neighbour's windows for, American-wise, there are no hedges in the City of Oil.

When he first comes out, the bachelor is provided with a comprehensive bed-sitting-room with a bath-

Photo Anglo Persian Oil Company

THE CITY OF OIL AT "FIELDS"

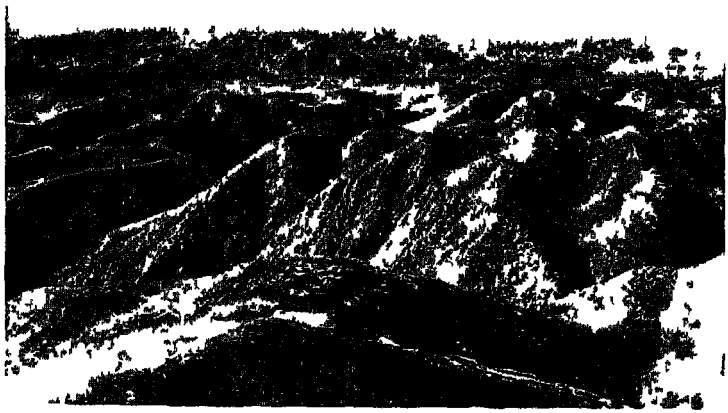


Photo Anglo Persian Oil Company

THE MOUNTAINS OF KHUZISTAN, WITH "FIELDS" AMONG THEM

room and a veranda. He feeds at the company's restaurant, where lunch or dinner costs 1s. 6d. Later, he moves to a house containing four such apartments and shares dining-room, sitting-room and cook with three messmates.

The simplest married quarters consist of two bedrooms, each with a bath, dining-room and sitting-rooms, but the managerial bungalows, in gardens ablaze with English flowers, might well have been transported from any complacent Middle-Western town defying the desert by means of science.

For rich and poor (if there are any poor in Abadan) domesticity is robbed of much of its hot-weather stress by the fact that the company undertakes its most onerous duties, for it bakes, paints, carpenters and launders, the latter almost too enthusiastically, since on one occasion, a visitor's frocks were returned to her with "A.P.O.C." stamped large across the front!

The company provides drinking-water for the native population, which numbers some sixty thousand in the town of Abadan, as well as for all sections of its own community, and it dispenses free medical and surgical aid throughout the Province. It employs seventeen British doctors and maintains large hospitals at its centres, a quarantine station, and isolation wards on board old river-steamers. It supplies power to the bungalows of Muhammerah and has built 1,600 miles of roads in Khuzistan.*

Abadan is as brilliantly lighted as Piccadilly, and when the summer temperature rises to 125° Fahrenheit it is cooled by every ingenious electrical device. The company makes its own ice and mineral water. It maintains tennis-courts, a polo ground, a golf-course, a swimming-pool, a cinema and a theatre. It provides mosques and pays for the services of priests; but the established religion of Abadan is OIL. Prospectors are its missionaries, and the managerial board its episcopacy. There is no god but the pipe-line and every enthusiastic worker conceives himself its Prophet!

* Late Arabistan.

The remarkable fire-station is staffed by highly-paid Persians, picked men and trained gymnasts, who beat the London record by getting out five engines in exactly 12¾ seconds from the moment the alarm was signalled from the top of one of the ninety-foot towers from which, in three shifts, watchers scan the danger areas night and day. These firemen also act as guards, for they regulate the traffic and ensure the general security, especially in those danger areas where scarlet notice-boards announce:

"Safety First. Give up your matches."

Abadan is fond of notices. In the General Office, one reads:

"SUGGESTION BUREAU.

"Can you improve on any of our methods?

"Think it over. It is up to you."

The only things which are never seen on the sacred island are money and oil. The company runs one of the most comprehensive stores in the world, where bills are charged against salaries, and there are no other shops except in the bazaar, where the chit system also rules, so coin is superfluous.

Oil can be smelt. In a south wind it can be felt and tasted, but except through one or two four-inch panes in the refinery, it is as invisible as any relic in a shrine.

Every day some five million gallons of crude oil are pumped down the pipe-line from fields a hundred and fifty miles away in the hills of Khuzistan. Every day a million and a half gallons of this oil are exported and the rest is dealt with in the refinery, where thirty per cent. petrol and five to fifteen per cent. kerosene is taken out of it. Abadan deals in four chief products, petrol, kerosene, gas oil and furnace oil, and there are two main processes which the stranger is invited to watch, the distillation (i.e. the separation of materials) and the refining or cleaning of such products. Three shifts are employed so that the process continues night and day throughout the year, though portions of the plant are closed in rotation for an annual overhaul.

Thermos fireless locomotives, filled with steam at

two hundred pounds pressure *outside* the danger zone, run over the thirty miles of railway track which connect the plant inside the formidable wire fence.

The industry is particularly interesting because the Anglo-Persian is one of the few companies which control and operate their own pipe-lines and refineries as also their shipments and selling organization.

A thousand cars are employed in the area which, with the co-operation of the present Persian Government, the company has done much to develop, for wells have been sunk in regions hitherto considered inaccessible and regular communications ensured. Paddle-steamers plying on the Karun river between Abadan and Fields facilitate the distribution of heavy cargo to outlying districts. A fleet of over a hundred tankers, loading four thousand tons an hour, distribute the various oil products and incidentally, the deepening of the bar of the gulf to facilitate the loading of the largest is a potential asset for Persia.

The tin factory, employing three hundred native workers at ninety to three hundred Krans a month, is capable of turning out a maximum of ten thousand four-gallon tins in an eight-hour day, and curiously enough, the Persian is able to stand both the noise of the machines and the mechanical process of which he is the servant, better than the average Anglo-Saxon, whom I have often seen exhausted mentally and physically by the endless repetition represented by the rolling belt and the mechanized action of a hand or a finger, to which his life inside the modern factory is reduced.

The workshops deal with every form of repair, from casting new sides for furnaces or screw piles for jetties, to making keys, and here Persian apprentices receive valuable training for an industrial career.

With the support of the government, which has recently succeeded in pacifying and to a great extent opening up the once savage province of Khuzistan, the company aims at interesting the youth of Persia in one of her greatest industries. The new railway from Bandar Shapur to Dizful, which will eventually connect

with the Caspian line, and the splendid engineering feat which drove the Dizful-Khurramabad road a hundred and ninety-two miles through the Zagros range have linked Khuzistan with the Persian nation of which it is an essential part. Schools follow in the wake of the arterial road and railway, which will make a vigorous national government independent of dictation from the North.

Persia is groping towards new outlets on the Gulf and in this she is supported by the company with which the prosperity of Khuzistan is inevitably concerned, for Persian oil has long contributed to the evolution of the South. It instituted elementary and secondary schools in Abadan, Ahwaz and Fields, and still largely contributes to the impetus which the Pahlavi Government has given to education.

At the present moment three-and-a-half million is being expended on the construction of a new cracking plant for breaking fuel oil in order to increase the percentage of petrol obtained from the crude product and on the subsequent development necessitated by an increase in labour, housing and transport. It is hoped that the boys now being educated in the schools, for which there are always more applicants than the accommodation permits, will become apprentices in the company's workshops and thence pass to the high clerical and technical positions for which the modern Persian can be fitted. The boy scouts, however, who are delightfully keen on their service, assured me that, one and all, they were going to be firemen!

Thirty years ago, the temple of Suleiman-i-Masjid attributed to the fire-worshippers, looked down upon a wilderness. Black limestone crags, the strata pitched on end, were heaped above a crumpled desolation of ferruginous shale streaked and spattered with gypsum, which looks like snow. The black tents of the nomads moved according to the seasons. The passes were crossed by mule-tracks and the silence disturbed by jackal and hyena.

To-day there is "Fields"—some eighty square miles

of sophisticated civilization set in the midst of the Bakhtiari Hills. Here four hundred and fifty Europeans and perhaps fourteen thousand natives minister directly, or indirectly, to the needs of oil. Within the gates, where speed-limits, metalled roads, traffic control and sign boards offer a startling contrast to the barren hills and deserted ranges, there is a town scattered over ten miles of blinding white ridges—a town complete with clubs, libraries and a panatrope, tennis and racquet courts, a race-course and Persian baths, night-schools where determined labourers are learning to read and write, workshops, a concert hall and a hospital, telegraph, telephone and wireless, not to mention a hundred and fifty miles of high-tension wire carried on standards which look like gibbets, and three hundred miles of the inevitable piping.

There is no green in Fields except in the garden plots, whose brilliance is a challenge to the incredible desolation of Khuzistan. Beyond the new roads and the geological camps, where prospecting is in progress, the Lurs, forgetting the faith imposed upon them twelve hundred years ago by the swords of Islam, may yet kindle the eternal fire on the high places once sacred to Baal, and stain the impassable rocks with the blood of sacrifices; but in Fields, the most modern plant has been installed and extensive research is carried out to serve the ever-increasing demand for light oils.

In the productive area, there are a hundred and fifty finished wells, twenty-one of which were operating during my visit. The oil from these flows into cylindrical separators, controlled by valves which allow the high-pressure gas to be driven off into the main which supplies the domestic and industrial needs of Fields. In this way, houses, offices, clubs and bazaars, the Persian bakery and baths, the electric generating station, the pumping station at Tembi and the plant itself are supplied with gas for heating, cooking and power. From the separators, the oil, relieved of high-pressure gas to the extent of an average of eight hundred tons a day, is driven into the flow tanks, where the low-pres-

sure gas rises to the top and is taken off to the gas absorption station. The oil then proceeds to the huge storage tank farm from where it is sent to Abadan by means of four pumping stations situated at intervals along the pipe-line.

In the gas absorption plant some thirty million cubic feet are treated every day, and of these every thousand are made to yield approximately three gallons of light gasoline which is pumped back into the crude oil and with it, travels to Abadan, for it is too gaseous a substance to have a hundred and fifty mile pipe of its own.

Eighty per cent. still remains to be dealt with, and research has proved that by high temperature treatment (Pyrolysis) a portion of this can be converted into benzol. The fully-equipped chemical laboratory is daily exploring other promising avenues and I was shown several products obtained from the superfluous oil gas which up to two years ago used to be burned in those colossal flares which ringed Fields with pillars of smoke by day and fire by night. Toluene and naphthalene are two of the most valuable, for these chemicals are used, the former in the manufacture of explosives, and the latter in synthetic dyes. Elemental sulphur can also be obtained for the manufacture of sulphuric acid and, of course, cosmetics, while carbon black can be made from the gas in a form suited to the preparation of printers' ink and other pigments, and also as a filler in the manufacture of rubber motor-tyres. Yet because Fields is some hundreds of miles away from the outposts of civilization the three flares which still exist burn daily sufficient of what in England would be an invaluable commercial commodity to heat, light and power the city of Manchester for twenty-four hours.

Before the introduction of the gas absorption plant, the low-pressure gas used to drift off the flow tanks, and condensing, settle like a white cloud in the bed of a small stream, suitably known as the Styx, and in those days, the road beside it had to be closed at night.

Nowadays, there is little smell of gas unless a storm momentarily extinguishes one of the flares, which is immediately relit at fifty yards range with a Véry pistol discharging a ball of coloured light.

It was beside the Styx, where oil seepage was visible, that the first well, the "Discovery," was drilled in 1908. The ancient derrick still remains to mark the spot where the promise of Dar-el-Khazineh (Gateway of the Treasury), the name of a village at the entrance to the foothills, was richly fulfilled.

The average depth of the modern well is some three thousand feet and the potential yield of oil from any one well averages two hundred and fifty thousand gallons. The cost of drilling ranges from £4 to £8 a foot according to position, and each well has to be treated as an individual. Its idiosyncrasies are tenderly watched by the production department in order to ascertain the percentage of gas in relation to oil at different depths and pressures. The deepest well in Fields is five thousand seven hundred feet and the deepest yet drilled anywhere is just over nine thousand feet.

In summer the earliest shifts begin work at five a.m. and continue with an interval for breakfast up till two-thirty p.m., for most of the drilling is done in the hot months when the climate is dependable, though the temperature rises to 120° Fahrenheit.

By day, Fields represents a series of such violent contrasts that it might well be Hollywood. There are the solid, one-story bungalows, growths on the uniform aridity of gypsum-scarred hills, and the hundred and twenty foot derricks which look like skeletons isolated among the Mountains of the Moon. There is the Persian market, crowded with nomads in wide black trousers, not unlike the exaggerated Oxford fashion, but worn under a loose three-quarter coat, so that in a wind when all these garments flow out in the lines of a Greek frieze, the Bakhtiari tribesmen might well have stepped down from the Parthenon. They wear inverted felt bowls on their bobbed black locks, their waists are indicated by an eleven-yard sash and

CHAPTER IX

THE NEW ROAD THROUGH LURISTAN

WHEN I left the oil-fields, I had to discard a habit of mind engendered by ten days' contact with systematic efficiency. For, between Abadan and Ahwaz, it is as unnecessary to think for oneself as it is for one of the human atoms involved in a personally conducted American tour to ask questions concerning its transport. Persia of the oil-fields is run on a beneficently autocratic system, of which every unit landed from a launch on the Shatt el Arab becomes an integral part. For instance, it would be impossible to lose or damage oneself between the incredible townships, which appear to have been transported ready-made from a Middle-western exhibition, without automatically setting in motion a comprehensive mechanical system which would result in prompt rescue. Consequently, visitors leaving Khuzistan—in Buick saloons, with bedding loaned by the A.P.O.C. and luncheon baskets made out of petrol tins filled from stores which rival Wanamaker's or Selfridge's—are under the impression that by means of schedules and inspections, not to mention a certain divine right vested in oil, the element of chance has been eradicated from human life. But long before they arrive at Dizful they are back amidst the uncertainties of the Middle Ages, for across this particular desert passage by car is as disintegrating to human substance as the sudden application of air-brakes on the Chicago flyers.

After several hours in the back of a stalwart American saloon, I came to the conclusion that donkeys were the only suitable means of transport on a track which leaped goat-like from chasm to chasm and finally

buried itself in a creek among a herd of submerged water-buffalo.

Civilization is represented by the telegraph wires on which thousands of bee-birds sit waiting for their next meal of locusts to walk confidingly across the desert, and modern enterprise by the exceedingly courteous Arabs who, having removed the bridge which was essential to the most optimistic conception of a road, sit cross-legged beside the marsh waiting to push lorries out of the mud.

For the rest, there are miles of yellow thistles, punctuated by crops of black camel-hair tents; and, of course, there is Shush, remarkable to-day for a colossal modern castle built by the French Government to house the antiquarians who are excavating Susa or Shushinak, the first capital of the independent Elamites, who, in 2000 B.C. under Khudar Lagamar, fought with Babylonia and Assyria. The invasion of Sennacherib was stopped by snow in 697 B.C., but fifty-two years later Assurbanipal conquered Shushan, carried off thirty-two statues of alabaster, gold, silver and bronze from the royal treasury, destroyed the god whose face no man might look upon in the Holy of Holies, burned the city and levelled to the earth its Great Tower. A century later Darius rebuilt it and here Daniel saw his visions and was, according to legend, suspended in a glass coffin from the bridge in the middle of the river so that no district could claim his grave.

Susa was on the royal road from Sardis, along which Xenophon and his ten thousand marched with Cyrus the Younger. Esther and Ahasuerus lived within the walls which the historian Strabo compared to those of Babylon. It was the winter capital of the Achæmenian rulers, and the famous frieze of the Archers which decorated their palace represented warriors of the Great King's bodyguard known as the Ten Thousand Immortals. There was also a frieze of lions, each one 11 ft. 3 in. long and 5 ft. 6 in. high, enamelled in polychrome on brick. But much of this splendour was destroyed by

Alexander, the scourge of Persia, who took ten millions sterling from the city and left it to decay. Shapur II rebuilt it, but the Arab invasion finally destroyed it and to-day there is nothing visible but a native village surrounding a comparatively modern building with fluted cones, like the temples of the devil-worshippers in Kurdistan, which is called the tomb of Daniel.

In A.D. 1100, Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela reported the existence of seven thousand Jews in Susa, and to-day there is a mixed Arab and Hebrew stock, who pass on the legends of a strangely modernized Prophet. For instance, an old man who lives near the site of what was once—perhaps—the den of lions, is convinced that Daniel was an opium-smoker. "He was a very clever man, that Imam,* and when he went down into the pit, he had some opium on the end of his stick. He pushed this into the mouth of the first lion and he liked it"—the old man smacked his lips and gave a pantomimic representation of one lion after another succumbing to the effects of Daniel's forethought!

In the same desert which may one day be fertilized by a vast irrigation scheme centred on the Karun river, is Shuster, probably built by the famous Sasanian warrior Shapur, who captured the Roman Emperor Valerian in A.D. 260. Like Susa, the city has been sacked and rebuilt as the tides of invasion flowed and ebbed. Tamerlane spared it because it surrendered without a battle, and in the hands of the Safavi dynasty it flourished as the centre of Shia fanaticism. At one time, under Fath Ali Shah, its population was estimated at forty-five thousand, but the graft of a succession of Persian governors, exiled to a remote province, reduced the once royal city to its present state of decay.

The castle has been rebuilt many times, but its walls are falling to pieces and the whole town looks as if it suffered from blight. Where the river runs through a deep gorge, with the houses piled up on either side so that they look as if they had grown out of the earth

*Teacher.

like monstrous ant-heaps, the cliffs are honeycombed with caves. In each of these is a water-mill with a couple of flat stones between which the flour is ground. The force of the stream is diverted through a series of artificial channels and the gorge represents therefore the most active industry in Shuster. A modicum of felt and coarse matting is woven in the bazaars, but the general impression is of gloom and decay. The streets are so narrow that three could not walk abreast. Into them refuse is discharged from a vent-hole in the wall of each house. The air is thick with dust and flies. The walls are high enough to shut out most of the light so that shortly after midday Shuster becomes a city of twilight. It is inhabited largely by fanatics who are gross, superstitious, indolent and crafty. The bazaars, roofed with rows of small cupolas, each with a hole in the centre, are comparatively empty, but the women's dresses provide welcome splashes of colour. I saw several matrons in tight emerald trousers with socks to match, and brilliant red and green check chuddas showing a hint of purple or magenta underneath. Lurs, with bobbed black hair, and wide flowing trousers under a three-quarter coat woven from goats' hair, bargained for metal work, and a small boy with flies set permanently round his eyes carried sixteen sheets of "newspaper" bread on his unwashed crown and dropped them whenever he stumbled over a pile of refuse, or bumped into a group of ill-favoured and unhealthy idlers.

Outside the crumbling town is the castle where Valerian is supposed to have been imprisoned for seven years, and local legend ascribes to him a bridge with Roman arches. To-day, storks garrison the towers. Every morning, reveillé is sounded by the clop-clop-petting of their gigantic beaks and by noon they are standing sentinel, each in his accustomed place, motionless on one absurdly scarlet leg like an artificial flower on a stalk.

The domes of neighbouring imamzadés, vividly blue under the velvet of encroaching lichen, provide nurseries for the next generation of storks and most

houses are favoured with a nest, but the human population is less active and apparently less productive.

The soldiers, lazing in the guard-room of the castle, smoke opium, because in Shuster they feel themselves marooned from the normal progress of life. Time ceases to have any meaning where nothing happens except an imperceptible dissolution. True, there is a gibbet outside the gate, but nobody is hanged on it unless it happens that a soldier has been killed. "Of course, it is much wickeder to kill a fighting man than a civilian," explained the least bemused of the guard, "for after all we have to protect the citizens and cannot be expected to look after ourselves as well. The government must do that."

In Shuster, I lunched with an elderly merchant whose beard was stained bright orange with henna. He wore a neatly-rolled white turban and a long white coat over what in Europe would be regarded as an old-fashioned nightshirt. He greeted us with "How is your Honesty?" and led us into a room lined with carpets. There were so many of them that I couldn't help thinking of upholstery. We sat on them, walked on them, and leaned against them, until lunch was announced. It consisted of some fifty dishes all put on the table at once and flanked with bottles of sour milk. There were vegetable pilaus, chickens soaked in sweet nut sauce and kebabs of three-day-old lamb wrapped in hot bread. All the meat was so delicately cooked that it could be broken between the fingers and in the mountains of rice each grain had a separate existence. Before and after the meal, we drank many glasses of very sweet tea in a court which, compared to the narrow squalor of the surrounding streets, was a revelation of beauty. Pomegranates blazed against slender arches and the house rose in a series of terraces to a parapetted roof where, still enclosed and secret, the merchant's family could spend the nights.

Dizful is the twin city to Shuster and it emerges as suddenly from the desert, because its bricks are the same colour as the earth from which they are made,

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A STREET IN SHUSTER

and only the conical imamzadés strike a contrasting note. But Dizful is at the end of the new road which strikes through the heart of the Zagros range. For a hundred and fifty miles from the temporary head of the equally new railway which it is hoped—by optimists who are certainly not economists—will some day link Tehran with the Persian Gulf, to Khurramabad, army headquarters in the south, the road is picketed like the Khyber Pass. Every mile or half-mile, sometimes less, there is a watch-tower made of the local mud-bricks coated with a mixture of clay and chopped straw. These forts, perhaps twenty feet high and ten in diameter, are perched on the most commanding rocks. Loopholed, with breast-high parapets, the only means of entry is a four-foot door half-way up, approached by means of a ladder which is pulled up at night.

The forts are within sight of each other, in some places not more than two hundred yards apart, and each is garrisoned by a dozen soldiers. The sun glints on expectant bayonets and a sentinel signals from one high place to another. Nevertheless, the security of the road is not yet assured, for three days before my arrival, five thousand sheep had been stolen from within sight of Dizful, and two hours after I passed, a lorry belonging to the American Minister in Tehran was attacked by forty tribesmen who looted what they required and destroyed the rest. Owing to the nature of the ground, the road guards were ignorant of the raiders' approach and subsequently their numerical inferiority prevented effective intervention.

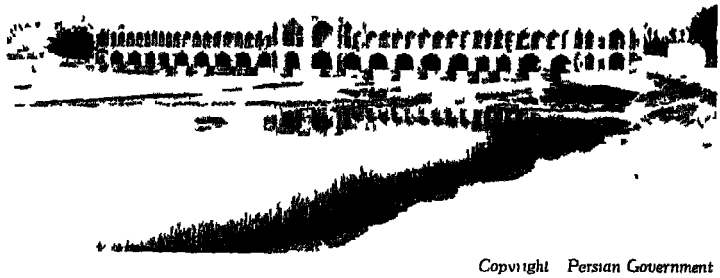
The road is a distinct engineering feat, on which the government is to be congratulated, for it runs through country hitherto considered impassable except for mules, and it owes its construction to the initiative of the public works department, who employed only Persian engineers and local labour. Some idea of the magnitude of the task may be gathered from the fact that seven battalions of troops were necessary for the protection of working parties. During five consecutive years these fought the tribes back and forth across the

road, for Lurs and Bakhtiaris regarded Khuzistan as their own preserve. Unconquered by Medes or Persians, by Alexander or Antiochus, though they were temporarily defeated by the Afghans in 1722, the Lurs are raiders by nature. Long before Tamerlane burned Khurramabad and Burujird (1386) as a punishment for the toll levied on Mecca-bound pilgrims, these tribes added to their legitimate pastoral occupations the more profitable one of murder. Of ancient Elamite stock, they were originally fire-worshippers and still, when a tribesman dies, a blaze is kindled on his grave, which in the case of a chieftain is subsequently decorated with a rudely-cut stone lion. Still, when a man enters the black camel-hair tent of the nomad with a torch in his hand, everyone present rises to salute the fire. Yet these people have been nominal Moslems for eight hundred years. They swear by the Koran, for which, however, they are liable to mistake any book in a red cover. Their oath is not always their bond, for I know of one case in which two guests killed their host after having eaten his food and sworn friendship with his house.

The Khans are apt to indulge in wholesale slaughter to determine the family succession. The story is told of a chieftain who had eight sons. He was killed by his heir, after which, each brother murdered his elder, till the two youngest decided to share what was left of the heritage.

Among these peoples, sullen, hardy, courageous, lacking most of the primitive virtues, for they are neither generous nor faithful, the feudal system has existed for several thousand years. But the present government is determined to substitute nationalism for those conflicting tribal politics which ensured to every agitator in the capital the backing of considerable nomad sections. In pursuance of this policy, Reza Shah is attempting an exchange of tribes. When I came up the mountain road, ten thousand Lurs accustomed to a wandering life between their summer pastures at an altitude of five thousand to nine thousand

A CONTRAST IN BRIDGES



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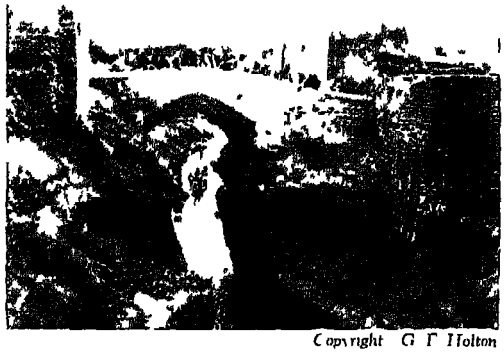
PUL-I-KHARDGOO, ISFAHAN'S FINEST BRIDGE



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AN ANCIENT BRICK BRIDGE AT SHUSTER

Photo Hovan Ahuas

THE NEW RAILWAY BRIDGE AT DIZFUL

feet and the salt desert where, in winter, they cultivate patches of cereals, were being most unwillingly settled round Ahwaz, Isfahan, and Kazvin.

When a tribe submits, the Sheikh is generally taken to Tehran as a hostage, together with the sons of some of the leading families who, sent to school in the capital, grow up to find themselves Persians instead of Lurs. The method is not new. Seventy years ago Nadir Shah forcibly transported numbers of Bakhtiari to Khorasan and they fought their way back at the expense of ravaged villages. But to-day disarmament progresses apace and the settling of tribes on agricultural land increases the acreage under cultivation and facilitates education in the nearest towns.

Dizful, where the new road begins, might well be called the City of the Blind, for, owing to complete lack of sanitation, most of the inhabitants suffer from eye-trouble. The narrow cobbled alleys between towering walls are no better than open cesspools, and until curfew sends the populace indoors, they echo with the faltering tap-tapping of sightless footsteps.

Fifty years ago there were a hundred and twenty indigo factories at Dizful, but the trade disappeared with the introduction of aniline dyes. Now the town is very poor. Twenty or more families live in each of the big, blind-walled houses built round a centre court, wherein grow pomegranates and sour oranges. The average rate of living is five shillings a week and the staple diet onions, bread thin as sheets of brown paper, goats' cheese and curdled milk called "Dogh," of which a Persian proverb says: "Each glass of dogh contains an extra year of life." On feast days there is probably a pilau made of rice and meat, and mulberries are plentiful.

Dizful, like Shuster, is piled up, one house apparently springing from the roof of another, above the river Karun. In the gorge are rows of flour-mills, each one a small, arched cubicle, with water-wheel attached. The millers work night and day in two shifts, sleeping and eating beside the grindstones which

are their gaolers, and in these little mud prisons surrounded by the swirl of the flood, they can earn up to £2 10s. a month.

In the bazaars there are expert nickel workers, who import their sheets of raw material from Germany, but at present their market is restricted, for the purchase of carpets made by the rebel Lurs is forbidden and it was these tribesmen who made an active trading centre of Dizful, taking metal-work, groceries and piece-goods in return for their live-stock and rugs.

Dizful is particularly fanatical. Most of the people can neither read nor write, and even its security is of recent date, for it was situated in "the bad lands" raided by Iraq and Persia. Its women show traces of Greek beauty, inherited from the armies of Alexander, and its stock is still tinctured with Elamite blood so that the type is quite different from the average Persian, as is the dress worn by the women. These are to be seen in tight-fitting trousers of purple or crimson, with equally brilliant chuddas, and the children wear saffron and scarlet, so that they light up the vaulted passages and the alleys doubling back and forth between blind walls. At Dizful I stayed in a house balanced high above the river which shook whenever the wind tilted at its terraces. The governor came to visit me and we talked of the new railway whose experimental section had been recently opened. It was a bad bit of work, for the cement piers had already cracked so that the bridges were in danger of falling. Sleepers had been forced apart by the subsidence of the mud embankment, which ought to have been strengthened by stone from the hills. The rails had sprung and twisted in the heat and apparently the width of water-courses had been calculated during a summer drought rather than in winter when much of the desert is under water. The governor spoke of the exploitation of Persia by foreign interests, of the necessity for withdrawing or revising concessions granted to the Imperial Bank and to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, but he acknowledged that the young extremists who want Persia

for the Persians and who believe themselves capable of running everything themselves without the help of foreign experts, were unlikely to refrain from graft. A young man who looked and spoke like any intelligent Western undergraduate acknowledged with a shrug that if the Persian manager of a Persian bank found himself with bags of two million thomans on deposit, "he would immediately go out into the market and lend it privately to his friends at most unfriendly rates!" Yet it is unlikely that the contracts by which German officials are running the new National Bank will be renewed at the end of their three years' term.

I learned that there were four hundred to a thousand soldiers "resting" at Dizful, and from these, new drafts are supplied to guard the road, but owing perhaps to the friction between military and civil authorities, noticeable throughout Persia, robbery in Khuzistan is still a comparatively remunerative occupation. It is likely, however, to be attended by steadily increasing risks as Reza Shah strengthens his hold on the reins of government which hung so loosely in the hands of his predecessors.

From Dizful I started up the new road, leaving behind me the railway line, with its mighty steel bridge, a kilometre long, crossing the Karun at Ahwaz, of which the Persians are justly proud. Over another bridge with arches of every size and shape, the centre suspension span contributed by the English during the war, I motored north with an Arab driver and a retainer called Ali, who had been lent me by Prince Rakhshani, the hospitable and energetic deputy-governor of the province. Ali had six inches of superb black moustache and a khaki frock-coat, so nobody knew if he were a general or a servant. Consequently, nobody interfered with us, though it was rumoured that the exorbitant prices charged by chauffeurs reluctant to negotiate the gradients and the river beds of the five hundred miles between Ahwaz and Tehran, were due as much to the army habit of commandeering passing cars as to the Lurs, who when driven across the road

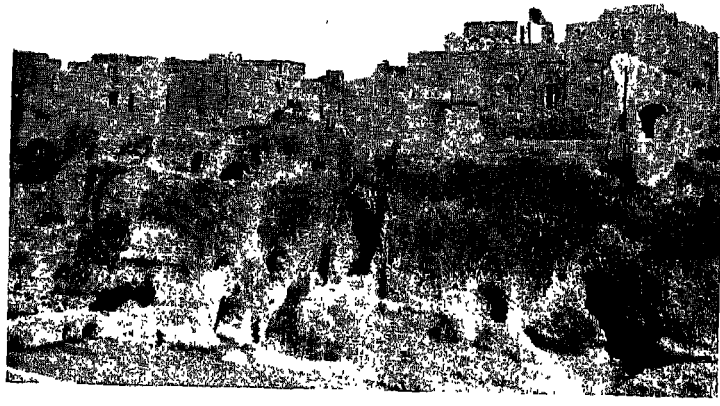
by pursuing troops, leave it bare as a field after the passage of locusts.

During the hundred and fifty guarded miles between Dizful and Khurramabad, we only met three cars. These were literally piled with passengers, who sat all over the mudguards and on the radiator, while the sides were so hung with luggage that the vehicle resembled a furniture-shop. The most spectacular of these moving bunches of humanity consisted of fourteen individuals all packed into and on a four-seater car, which was yet progressing at a considerable pace because it was well known that two lorries had been looted by the Mirjawand tribe during the previous week.

The new road is metalled, but after a season of unparalleled storms, the river beds had overflowed, there had been several landslides, and the embankment had in some cases silted away. Therefore, it was not possible to average more than fifteen miles an hour. After leaving Khurramabad, where a two-year-old road joins the new one, progress was often limited, for before plunging into each swollen stream the magneto had to be swathed and a party of tribesmen engaged to push the vehicle through the rising water.

Fortunately, the Lurs have discovered that the present condition of the road makes it a profitable concern, and as I happened to pass over it after and during very heavy rain, we generally found a group of villagers, or nomads complete with water-buffalo, waiting expectantly at every river bed.

In the mountains there are no villages. Between the great limestone crags, the valleys are brilliantly green. Sheets of poppies grow under dwarf oak. Nomad tents are clustered in groups wherever there is water. They are exceedingly dirty, for the young animals apparently live with their owners and every camp is surrounded by radiating flocks of sheep and goats. Excellent horses, which show a good deal of Arab blood, are to be found among them, and in the spring they were all covered with well-fitting Lur cloths made



DIZFUL ON THE RIVER KARUN

BAKHTIARI TRIBESMEN (WITH THE SKULL-CAPS)

of hand-woven cotton. Some of the tribeswomen are exceptionally tall and they wear only one loose robe, generally red or purple, with a roll of black stuff on the head.

At intervals of ten or twenty miles, there are great fortified caravanseraies, with a watch-tower at each corner, in which the mule caravans shelter for the night. Distance is measured by farsakhs, and unfortunately these vary according to the nature of the ground. A farsakh is supposed to be the distance covered by a loaded mule in an hour, perhaps four to four and a half miles in the plains and two and a half to three miles in the mountains, but if the guide is an optimist a farsakh may be anything he chooses to imagine. We came to one so long that, as the exasperated driver exclaimed: "It could have eaten seven others."

Prince Rakhshani had kindly arranged that we should "sleep with the army" at Khurramabad, but when we reached the town after an eight hours' drive from Dizful, it was pouring and nothing would induce my companions to stop. "The bridges will be down," they said, "and this is a bad place. It has the biggest fleas in Persia, and besides, there is always fighting."

So we left the military headquarters, which is also the centre of the stone-marten trade, and only from a distance did I see the mud-built town squeezed between two great outcrops of rock, with the ruined castle of the Atabegs who ruled from A.D. 1155 to 1600, and were mentioned by Marco Polo as lords of one of the eight Persian kingdoms.

After leaving the mountains, we ran across a treeless plain, green as Swiss meadows and plastered at long intervals with very flat, mud villages in which the majority of the houses were one-roomed and all of them one-storied, with sagging clay roofs supported on trunks. Nobody is allowed to pass after sunset, but, having retailed a gruesome history of a car attacked under the walls of Burujird and its driver shot through the head against the glare of his headlights—"Fine

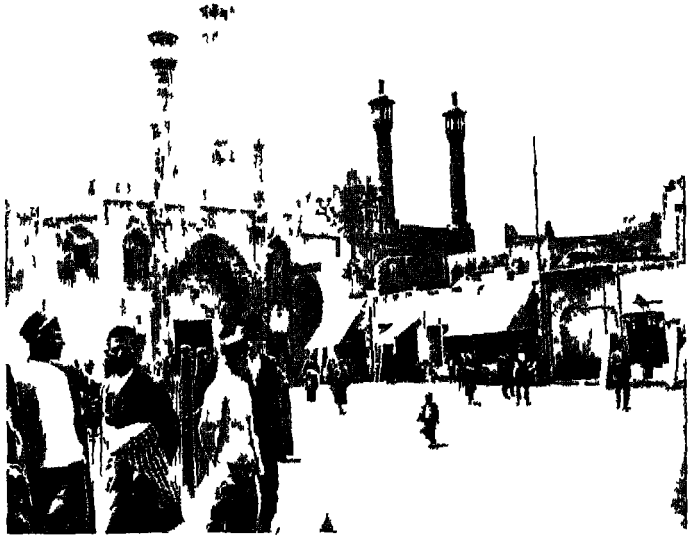
firms which dye their own wool and issue it to the surrounding villages, so that caravans of donkeys go forth laden with vivid packs. Scores of Armenian buyers for the New York and Chicago firms live in the neighbourhood, and the best carpets are made from worsted yarns imported from Manchester at 5s. 6d. per pound. The dyes used are vegetable, or German helinean, which latter costs five times as much as any other.

In one of the big distributing houses, I saw a square twenty inches by eighteen inches, with the figure of Ali woven on it, as a present for a Mujtahid in the holy city of Kerbela. This little carpet had 1,600 stitches to the square inch and took a man a year to make, but he refused to repeat the order on a larger scale because it had affected his eyesight.

There was also a copy of a Shah Abbas carpet which would be sold in America for £1,500. This contained 625 stitches to the square inch, measured about twelve feet by eight feet, and occupied six women for four years. It had a border of Koranic lettering praising all that concerned carpet-making from sheep and silk-worms to the Pahlavi Government, and the Ulema promptly objected, saying that the letters of the Sacred Book must not be trodden under foot, to which the makers retorted that the carpet was so fine it would certainly be hung on a wall.

From Sultanabad, where all faiths and all nationalities are hospitably tolerated, the road goes to Kum, the second most sacred city in Persia, where nearly every-one wears the turban reserved for Mullahs and where bazaar rumour still affirms that the Babis, erstwhile most persecuted of philosophers, devour live children! Here is the golden-domed tomb of Fatima the Immaculate. Here there are four hundred imamzadés, blue-domed tombs of the Faithful, and the Ulema insist that a dozen kings, not to mention five hundred saints and princes, are buried in the miles of cemeteries which surround the mosque. Here the Koran is read night and day, and in this so-called "Seat of Safety," which

THE HOLY CITY OF KUM



THE MOSQUE OF FATIMA THE IMMACULATE

of course provides "bast" (refuge) for every escaped criminal or political refugee, no Jews, Parsees, or Europeans, no metaphysicians or other heretical philosophers are allowed to dwell. The river Kara-Chai washes the mud walls and reflects the gold and blue splendour of this fanatical city, while a few miles away the same waters lave Marco Polo's Saba—now Saveh —from which, it is said, the Magi set out to worship Christ.

So from the old to the new and back again to the old, the road which will one day be a great trade route goes on to Tehran, where, under an energetic modern government, the West has routed the East.

CHAPTER X

INTERLUDES IN THE ANDERUN

I HAD meant to drive straight from Sultanabad to Tehran, for between the Manchester of Persia and the capital, the road is good. Also I was curious to see what manner of men were responsible for the change which goes deeper than the dressing-up of a people for a brief act on a Western stage. The passing of religion, the adoption of a Western standard of education, the growth of security and a network of new communications, may well foster in the average Persian a feeling of self-importance unknown when his ignorance was at the mercy of the Mullah and his goods subject to the depredations of government officials as well as of brigands, but it seemed to me from the first moment I entered Persia-beyond-the-oil-fields that the whole fabric of modernization depended on the capital. So I would have hurried across the scarlet desert, the Western edge of the Dasht-i-Kavir, whose saline desolation occupies the whole of the interior of Persia. But when I reached Kum I was fascinated by its gold and blue. It happened that I had an introduction to a merchant who spoke some Arabic and who insisted on taking me round the bazaars, famous for their shoesmiths and their armourers, for melons, long-necked water-jars and a host of objects which reproduce in pottery the blue of the domed imamzadés.

From Kum half the roads of Persia radiate to towns which were once dynastic or commercial capitals, but the holy city is only interested in her pilgrims, who, after they catch sight of the great golden dome blazing out of the polychrome sands, must dismount for prayer.

Like all Persian towns, Kum has known little but

war and destruction. Timour sacked it and the Afghan invasion completed its ruin, but later it became the burial-place of the Safavi and Kajar Shahs. The famous Fath Ali Shah swore that if he achieved the throne he would so enrich the shrine that it would make Imam Reza (buried at Meshed) jealous of his sister Fatima, who is supposed to have fled from Baghdad to escape the persecution of the Caliph. He fulfilled his vow by replacing the blue tiles, which would now have been priceless, by a dome of beaten gold and by erecting a college for a hundred students. Moreover, he always approached the city on foot, with the result that now from all the new roads which bear modern lorries to the trading centres of Kazvin, Tehran and Isfahan, wild men with matted hair and sheepskin coats, amulets sewn into the flesh of their naked chests, come barefoot through the heat of the desert and the snows of distant mountains to the Safavi Mecca.

After our tour of the bazaars, my friend fed me on manna (gez), which in its original condition is a white, glutinous substance found on the branches of tamarisks, willows, thorns and oak. Some say it falls from heaven, and some that it is deposited by insects, or exuded by the bark, but whatever it is, the Persians regard it as a special delicacy. In the early morning they shake or scrape it off the boughs into flat baskets, and mixing it with chopped almonds and pistachios, let it harden into a paste not unlike a stiffer form of Turkish delight.

The merchant then presented me with a bowl of rose-leaves and took me to the house of a singularly religious friend who did not believe in the emancipation of women. We drank tea and we gazed at piles of delicious-looking sponge-cakes which were apparently only used as ornaments or as indication of a most generous hospitality to follow. After the third cup, my host voiced his feelings: "Never, never shall it be decent for any woman to read or write!" he thundered, and everyone listened respectfully because he was a *Mujtahid*, famed for so much learning and holiness,

that pilgrims visiting the sacred city considered his blessing almost as important as a journey to the tomb of Fatima the Immaculate.

He was an old man with a grey beard, hennaed in deference to the wishes of his youngest wife, a long white robe not unlike a nightshirt, and a turban of the vivid emerald green which signifies that the wearer has made the pilgrimage to Mecca. He had consented to entertain me in deference to the wishes of the merchant whose house overflowed with wedding guests, but after satisfying his instinct for hospitality by providing me with what he called "an unworthy and inadequate meal," consisting of one sheep, two lambs, five chickens, a sack of rice, several mountains of vegetables and a veritable sea of sour buffalo milk, he voiced his horror of modern woman. Subsequently, unable to mention the anderun* or its occupants before the other wiseacres whom he had invited to drink sweet Persian tea and smoke water-pipes, while an invisible lute challenged the nightingales in a thicket of white roses, he pushed me, without any explanation, through a door which I had not previously observed.

It shut firmly behind me and I found myself in what might well have been an entirely separate house. A wide veranda ran round four sides of a court in which there was a sunken tank surrounded by pomegranates in flower, orange trees and flaming scarlet creepers. The stars were just coming out in the square of sky that could be seen. Carpets were spread on the tiled floor and a group of women of all ages sat cross-legged upon them or leaned against the hard, Eastern bolsters which always seem to have been stuffed with young potatoes.

My hostess rose awkwardly and gave my hand an uncertain shake. She was probably quite young and she must have been beautiful for she had the green eyes of a Circassian set in a pale face, finely modelled, with straight features, but her hair hung in crimson wisps. Kohl was smeared down to her cheekbones.

*Anderun is the Persian for harem.

Her fingers had been dipped in paste made of marigolds and henna, and the palms of her hands, her toes and the lobes of her ears were dyed the same fierce orange. Unfortunately, she could only talk Turkish and a few words of Persian, so we were unable to do more than gesture our interest in each other. For some minutes we sat in silence, while the lady of the house sucked at the amber mouthpiece of a kalyan, in which the rose-water bubbled. The usual glasses of strong tea were brought to me, with a saucer of rose-leaf jam and some long, loosely-rolled Persian cigarettes. Then a girl in a very short cotton frock with bobbed brown hair spoke to me in halting Arabic. It transpired that her mother came from Iraq and that both regarded the life of the fanatical city wherein they now lived much as a co-educated collegiate might consider "Slocum-in-the-Mud."

She translated for me and I learned that the painted lady was the mother of my host's three sons and therefore secure in her position. A few years ago she had selected from among her friends another wife for a husband whose attentions had become too exigent, but as the girl proved delicate, she had been supplanted by a mere child, apple-cheeked and plump, grand-niece of a Persian Shah. So now there were three wives. My self-appointed interpreter pointed them out.

The middle one wore black trousers, immensely wide to the knee and tight as stockings from there to the ankle, with a white silk dress tucked into the top of them, under the habitual chadour, the all-enveloping black mantle which transforms the Persian lady into a sable tent when she walks in the street.

The youngest was splendid in a flowered muslin robe worn under a long coat of sapphire and gold brocade. She tinkled with heavy gold jewellery and her smooth dark head was surmounted by a turban tasselled and decorated with gold coins.

Most of the other women were visitors, still wrapped in their chadours, with the quaint little black horsehair visors under which they look out at a narrow

strip of life, pushed up on to their foreheads. They were all very polite and pressed upon me all sorts of things to eat, from melon seeds, whose regular cracking made an accompaniment to their speech, to sherbet which is a sort of fruit squash. Servants leaned against the wall, or sat on their haunches and stared at me, joining in the conversation whenever it pleased them.

At last a number of opium pipes were brought and a girl kneaded the sticky brown pellets above a fragment of charcoal in a wire sieve which she swung about in the air to induce a glow. The pipes had round china bowls, pierced with a single small hole, above which the pellet is balanced, and a wooden stem about a foot long.

The first one was offered to me, and stimulated by curiosity and a little fear, I accepted it. At first the smoke stuck in my throat and I choked. The women laughed at me and showed me how I must inhale deeply and slowly. They indulged in two or three pipes before their skins became more thickly opaque and their eyes acquired a peculiar glaze. I contented myself with one pipe, and as a result, felt no more than a mild benignity. I was no longer bored with the interminable repetition of question and answer, punctuated by long silences. I did not care whether I slept or not. Life was quite agreeable, though bereft of past and future.

While we smoked, the servants had been spreading thick vividly-covered quilts on the flat roof, surrounded by a wall which ensured privacy. When I had reached a stage in which I was not conscious of existing separately from the floor on which I sat and the bolster against which I leaned, there was a stir among the women. Some slipped away through a passage which led eventually to the street—black formless shadows among blind walls. The others climbed by means of ladder-like steps, each one a couple of feet high, on to the roof, where my hostess offered me a choice of quilts. I selected a violet one with a royal purple bolster and wondered vaguely how much

clothing I was expected to remove. The women settled the question by tucking themselves, fully dressed, between their wadded coverings, which they drew well over their heads in spite of the intense heat, so that soon the roof looked as if large, brilliantly-coloured cocoons had been dropped all over it. A servant went among the sleepers with a silver censer which she thrust under each quilt in turn, so that its strongly perfumed smoke eddied among my dreams and added to their confusion.

Sunrise stirred the anderun roof to reluctant activity. Strained white faces yawned upon unyielding pillows. One by one the women dragged themselves from the cocoons of scarlet, orange, and petunia. Children whom I had not noticed the previous night emerged from what was now a litter of exotic bedding. They were seized by their mothers, shaken and patted into comparative tidiness.

I felt that only a cold bath would save me. The girl in the European cotton frock had gone home to an anderun with brass beds, muslin frills and pink bows, Germanic illustrations of Shakespeare on the walls, and on a chenille-fringed tablecloth the Eastern equivalent of an aspidistra. But when I expressed my desire for a large basin and much water—in Persia this generally produces the family baking-tin, which serves admirably as a bath—a servant whose eyebrows had been plucked and a black streak substituted right across the forehead from one ear to another, led me to a tank sunk in the tiled floor. There was a good deal of rustling up above and it occurred to me that the whole of the household proposed to watch my ablutions. The water was dark and turgid, but the servant encouraged me to undress and to lower myself, gingerly, into unplumbed depths. Clutching the stone rim, I stretched out a cautious foot. Lower and lower went my inquiring toes till they touched a substance soft and squelchy. The squeal with which I leaped out of the tank startled my companion. Explanations followed, but I could not understand them. Finally,

with many comforting gestures, the girl produced a pole with which she fished out the body of a very dead cat. Smiling cheerfully, she then invited me to proceed with my bath.

Unwashed, I continued my journey to Tehran. It began to rain. Within the city gates the car skidded from one pot-hole to another, while trams glided with derisive smoothness as if suggesting that the hummocks only existed in the Buick's imagination.

The capital keeps the secrets of its beauty behind miles and miles of garden walls. There are walls of every kind, of plaster, brick and mud, for when a Persian buys property, the first thing he does is to build a wall round it. Then he makes an imposing gateway, but very often he doesn't bother about a house. He plants a garden with lots of fruit trees and flowering bushes. Water he must have, and beside his sunken pool, fed by a canal from the city main, he grows roses, the single yellow, white, and orange varieties sung by Iranian poets. There is never any grass, and generally the flowers grow wild among the trees, but there may be a small pavilion or a tent from which, on what the philosopher considers a really fine day, he can watch the rain feeding his precious garden, wrenched at the expense of hard labour from the surrounding desert.

On the day I came to Tehran I saw nothing but dripping sun-blinds, striped orange and white, which gave the town a continental expression. Behind the convex blinds were rows and rows of shops, most of them open-fronted, from which the goods escaped on to the side-walk, so that pedestrians picked their way between anything from furniture to teapots. The long, straight streets were lined with planes and acacias, the latter heavy with white bloom. There were scarlet buses, and policemen in pale blue raised on tribunes which looked like small pagodas. Victorias rattled by, the hoods lined with scarlet and the horses splendid in silver-studded harness, but their reign is almost terminated. American cars are taking their place.

In the main square a number of public buildings were being constructed after the unimaginative fashion sacred to municipalities all over a civilized but unæsthetic world. The Imperial Bank was moving—with the times—from an old house studded with tiles to a construction which would find favour in the Middle West.

It was said that the new prison, built to accommodate foreigners after the withdrawal of the Capitulations, was more comfortable than the hotel, but most of the garages let rooms after the fashion of the caravanseraies which harboured camels on the ground floor and their owners up above.

My first impression of Tehran was slightly Hollywoodesque, for the new streets looked as if they had not quite settled where they were going, and the rows of new houses, one-room deep, were all frontage. They seemed to have no backs at all and they ended suddenly in space as if they were part of an unfinished set which would never be used in filmland. A profusion of notices in a variety of languages indicated emporiums of Levantine aspect, which just escaped the restrictions of a bazaar without achieving separate entity, since a passing glance failed to reveal where one ended and the next began.

In front of much commerce, accentuated by signboards as a face by too heavy brows, passed a stream of pedestrians at approximately one mile per hour. There were a few hats among the visors which make gratings in the Persian chadour, revelatory or not, according to the angle at which the wearer adjusts them, but they belonged chiefly to foreigners. The hat is not yet a usual form of headgear among the ladies of Tehran, though subsequently, I met a number of charming models perched on equally attractive heads, whose owners spoke French and thought after the manner of their speech.

The next day it had stopped raining and I saw the vaulted bazaars tunnelling into dead centuries, but the booths under the arches had been Europeanized. They

sold high-heeled shoes and modern jewellery, but there was an old man sitting cross-legged beside a tray of sour green plums and a stall whereon the bottles of milk and dogh were arranged like the pipes of an organ. There was a whole street of brass wherein the hammers imitated a jazz orchestra, and I found a lovely cook-shop where everything mysteriously edible was sizzling on a dozen braziers. Sweetmeats tempted equally the Pahlavi hat, the chadour, and the plus fours, while their vendor sang a little song all about sugar.

I was taken to the American college and told there were eight hundred and fifty students drawn chiefly from the upper and lower classes, representing from different angles the land, for the middle class, absorbed in individual trade, does not contribute in proportion to its numbers. We studied the list of books taken that day from the library and found that with the exception of five novels (including a Dostoievsky and an Anatole France), and one volume of the Arabian Nights, it consisted of works of science, philosophy, and religion.

The Persian is easily interested in literature, for he likes the sound of the words and the swing of poetry, but he is also learning baseball and he gets up at five a.m. to practise it.

There are fourteen American teachers, and the total courses, elementary, secondary, and collegiate, spread over sixteen years. Students can specialize in literature, science or commerce. The second includes geology and chemistry, while book-keeping, accountancy, shorthand, typing and economics are comprised in the third. There is also a pre-medical course to prepare students for the training given at the American college in Beirut. Here then is one side of Persia, a-religious, for no difference is made between Moslem or Zoroastrian, Jew, free-thinker or Christian, a side which will eventually, one hopes, find expression in industry and scientific agriculture, rather than in politics as represented by government employment, hitherto the Mecca of educated youth.

Later that day, in a garden where pine-trees and

roses were reflected in a marble tank, I talked with a young Persian who must have been earning a couple of thousand a year in Persian oil. His energy was remarkable and unusual. He had even acquired the European habit of saying what he meant, whereas, for the majority of his countrymen, the only purpose of words is to disguise thought. I asked him whether the whole structure of modernization, represented by the American and Church Missionary Society Colleges, and the new high roads with their efficient policing, by Western dress and the *noli-me-tangere* attitude of mind encouraged by politicians, depended on the life of the Shah.

He replied that nationalism in Persia was not new, and he gave me its history thus:—Sayed Jamal ed Din, known as the Afghan, but really from a village near Hamadan, started the national movement more or less simultaneously in Persia, Turkey, and Egypt. That was about seventy-five years ago. One of his strongest supporters was Malkam Khan, for a long time Persian Minister in London, who was against theory of absolute monarchy and in favour of general education, whereas with Jamal ed Din, it was primarily a Pan-Islamic movement, which he induced the Sultan Abdul Hamid to foster. The younger generation of Mullahs tended to divert the Sayed's policy towards an independent nationalism, for the Shias were never, in practice, Pan-Islamic.

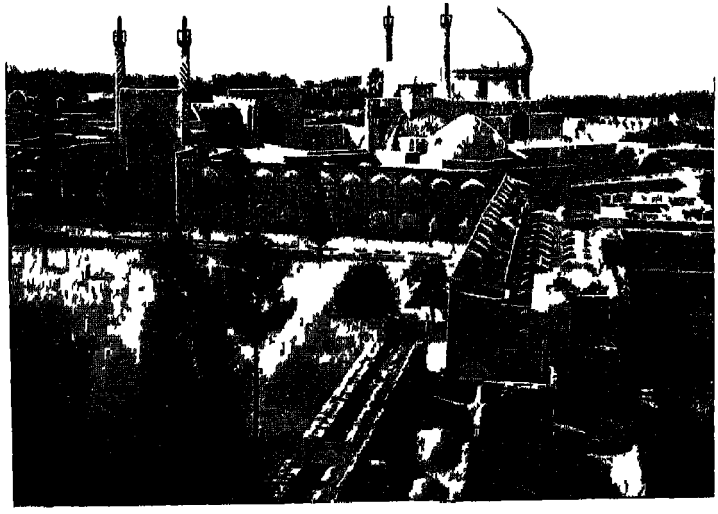
Between 1907 and 1914, Persia was dominated by the Russo-English agreement which divided the country into two spheres of influence. The first constitution was exacted from Muzaffer ed Din, whose father Shah Nasr-ed-Din had been killed in 1896 by a disciple of Jamal ed Din, but an absolute monarchy was re-established by his successor, Mohamed Ali. The latter was succeeded by his son Ahmed, a boy of thirteen, during whose minority the constitution was restored. The long struggle represented by these alternate victories and defeats, not only consolidated a definite national party, but gave rise to an anti-foreign feeling which was

justified by Lord Curzon's attempt to impose a virtual protectorate upon post-war Persia. From this she was saved first by Russia and then by Reza Shah, for in 1920, the British policy veered from what my young Persian termed "one of those useful synonyms for colonization in which your language abounds," to a cry of "Hands off Persia." The reason being that with the Russian occupation of the Caucasus, Lord Curzon knew that if Britain attempted a protectorate, Russia would advance and, if necessary, enforce an equal claim.

The "Hands off Persia" policy gave the nationalists their chance, and Reza Shah, then a colonel of Cossacks, took it with both hands. Within six years he had established himself by means of a military occupation and the stepping-stones of Prime Ministry and Presidency, as Shah of what is practically his own invention, for the original conception of Sayed Jamal was utterly different from Reza's Persia, isolated equally from East and West, standing on its own merits and resources, under a national banner which pays no tribute to Islam.

It was this Persia that I set forth to see, and because lorries, bearing carpets and asafœtida to India, pilgrims to the Holy City of Meshed, cotton to Turkestan and sugar from Russia to all parts of Azerbaijan or Khorasan, have taken the place of mule caravans, it was by motor-truck that I travelled some five thousand miles round a land which is at present balanced between the conflicting claims of centuries far apart.

There is amazing progress in the towns. There is safety from one boundary to another. Except in the blank spaces represented by the vast central deserts, the Sea of Salt (Dasht-i-Kavir) and the Sea of Sand (Dasht-i-Lut), communications are spreading all over the kingdom. But in the country districts, civilization is no more than a symbol, such as the Pahlavi hat, and nowhere is the conflict between old and new more clearly registered than on the three-quarter-ton lorries or two-and-a-half-ton trucks which cross anything



THE MASJID-I-SHAH AT ISFAHAN

THE MADRASSEH OF SHAH HUSAYN AT ISFAHAN

from three hundred to seven hundred miles of desert, laden with European goods. On the top of these, packed like locusts, crowd veiled women with hennaed finger-tips, and peasants with Pahlavi hats balanced on top of their turbans.

The majority of the drivers are Armenians, with a sprinkling of Russians, Turks, Afghans, Baluchis and Sikhs, but the passengers are Persians, whether they be neatly tweeded or wrapped in diverse folds. They talk politics and business, or smoke an opium pipe. They descend at intervals to pray, or to help change the tyres, but whatever their costume and creed, at certain moments they are completely united. That is when they drink tea. In fact, on those five thousand miles I found but one fundamental unity and it was expressed in the tea-khané, shortly no doubt to be interpreted by a Thermos flask.

CHAPTER XI

FROM ISFAHAN TO SHIRAZ BY MOTOR-TRUCK

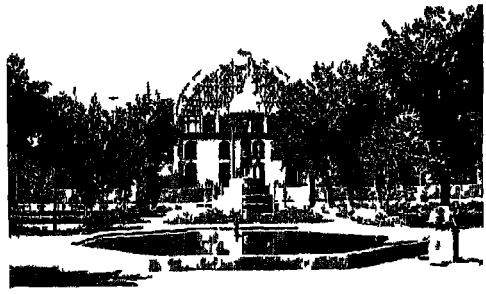
IN the days of its glory Isfahan was the capital of Shah Abbas. It had a population of nearly a million. Its circumference was twenty-four miles; 1,500 villages flourished in the neighbourhood and its proud inhabitants boasted that "Isfahan is half the world."

To-day, its dim, vaulted bazaars and its gardens, which keep their secrets behind twenty-foot mud walls, are strewn over a third of the original space, and the polo ground of Shah Abbas, 560 yards long, is to be converted into a public park.

With a very modern young Persian, who had married a grand-daughter of Shah Nasr-ed-Din, I wandered round a city of sudden contrasts.

"The Isfahanis are very mean," said my companion. "It's in the air. If a Tehrani comes here, he catches the infection. It is hard to do business, though an Isfahani will sell anything, his own or somebody else's—at a price. I know a very rich man who tests every egg bought by his cook with a curtain ring. If the egg is small enough to pass through the ring, it is promptly returned to the bazaar. When the late Shah visited Isfahan, he halted at a village outside and said to his courtiers: 'If you want anything from me, ask for it now, but be silent when we reach the city.'"

Within sight of the Masjid-i-Shah, wherein is preserved the blood-stained shirt of Husayn, and from whose tall minarets no *azzan* was allowed to sound for fear the *muezzins* might see too much of the royal harem, we visited the largest modern factory in Persia.



IN THE MADRASSEH AT ISFAHAN

ENTRANCE TO THE MARKET AT ISFAHAN

INTERIOR OF MADRASSEH

VIEW FROM THE ALI KAPI GATE AT ISFAHAN

Here three hundred workers are employed, including two German mechanics, and an average of three hundred yards of cloth is turned out every day. Half of the material is khaki for the army, but the rest supplies the rather loosely-woven fancy suitings of young Persia at approximately eleven shillings a yard, double width. In this factory seventy women are employed sorting the raw sheeps' wool into piles of different colours and spinning it into a rough preliminary yarn on hand looms. They work and eat in a large harem room which no man may enter, and they earn fourpence to eightpence a day, while the men's wages vary from one shilling to five shillings in the case of expert mechanics.

Beside the Ali Kapi gate, from whose coloured roof in 1660 Shah Abbas used to watch the slaughter of his enemies, or the arrival of some foreign embassy, and which still offers "bast" to anyone who can establish himself under a great chain cluttered with votive rags, there is a humbler sort of factory. Here, in a cellar which is cool and high, there are a dozen eighteen-foot looms whereon, for eleven hours a day, small, chubby infants, aged four or five, make fine carpets with 1,600 knots to the square inch. They earn twopence a day, and having timed the mite who was supposed to be most expert, we found he could do twenty knots a minute with fingers that looked more suited to a bottle or a woolly toy. Meanwhile, a foreman was chanting the pattern in a sort of rhyme, and this particular work is hereditary in certain families.

With the same efficient guide, I motored out of Isfahan, whose population is now estimated at eighty thousand. The majority of these are engaged in the crafts for which the erstwhile capital was famous: copying old designs in silver and brass, or in inlaid and painted wood. We passed the blue-domed madrasseh of Shah Husayn, built two hundred years ago as a dervish monastery with its huge silver-plated doors and the marks of the Afghan invasion still apparent in its battered roofs, and crossed the finest bridge in old Persia 380 yards long, with a double arcade on either side, the gift

of Ali Verdi Khan, the most successful general of the great Shah Abbas.

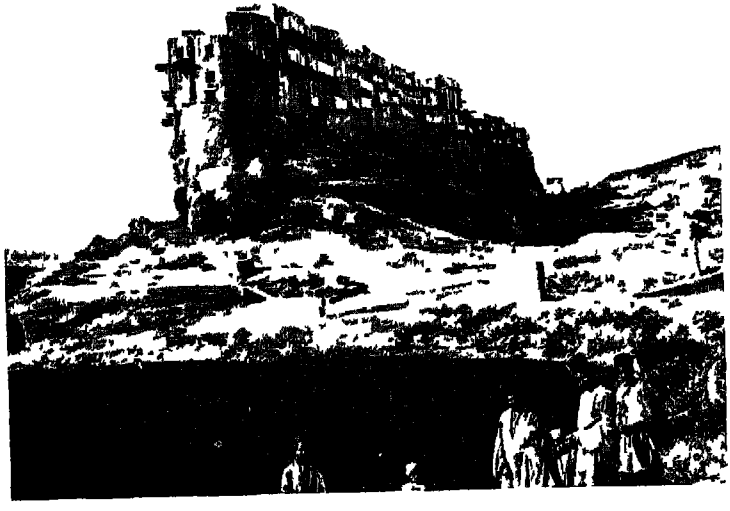
"Most of my contemporaries are free-thinkers," said my companion, glancing back at the city which knew so many martyrdoms in the name of religion. "They have no time to study any faith. They do not even know the names of our great poets. They have no time for the philosophy which delighted our parents. Everybody must make money because the standard of living has increased with this new desire to imitate Europe. We must have motors, and our wives must have crêpe de Chine, but, with the new tax on cars (approximately £2 a month, irrespective of horse-power) it will be cheaper to put away our motors and take an extra wife!"

I learned that the necessity for economy was enforcing monogamy among the upper-class Persians. "And we marry much later, not till we are twenty-six or thirty," explained my companion, who had been allowed to catch a glimpse of his wife in a mirror before he became engaged to her.

But still the hospitals of the Church Missionary Society, which does excellent work in Southern Persia, are full of children of twelve or thirteen suffering from the effects of premature marriage. In the poorer classes the mothers sell their daughters to any man who can feed them, for Persia is passing through a financial crisis. The merchants are paralysed by the edict forbidding the purchase of foreign sterling. The import of raw material has stopped, so the small hand factories are closing and unemployment is rife.

"The modern spirit has affected the peasants," said my companion when we reached his eight-thousand-acre estate on which the largest village has a population of five thousand. "In the old days, the landlords had their own prisons and they could beat the peasants as they chose, but now if the labourer refuses to pay us our share of the crop, we can do nothing but be polite and go to court about it and justice is often delayed for two or three years."

ENTRANCE TO THE VILLAGE OF YEZDIKHAST



THE VILLAGE OF YEZDIKHAST, WHICH MEANS "GOD WILLED IT"

Amused at the seigneurial idea of "the good old days," I inquired further and learned that the value of Persian land depends on the density of its population, for labour is bought with the estate. The peasant cultivates his landlord's acres and pays him from one-third to two-thirds of the crop according to whether the land is irrigated or not and to who provides seed and implements. As the peasant is invariably in debt to his landlord, he cannot leave the estate, but with the new creed that each man is as good as his neighbour and better than the foreigner, it is becoming more and more difficult to collect the landowner's share of the crop.

"The Persian is the best liar in the world," said my companion who was engagingly frank. "He thinks it is stupid to tell the truth and he prides himself on evading it as far as possible."

With this remark in mind, I was not surprised when the driver of the motor-truck, which was to take me to Shiraz, arrived three hours late with a host of such ingenious excuses that it was impossible to blame him.

On the top of huge bales of cotton, sprawled the half-dozen passengers, among whom were an Arab with a sense of humour and a veiled Persian woman who smoked steadily for seven hours.

As we left Isfahan the sun was slanting over the red desert. The hills were sudden outbursts of sharp red rock. Kumisheh, a great city before the Afghan invasion, with its miles of broken walls and its great round pigeon-towers, provided welcome relief to the monotony. In a large cemetery cheerful groups had spread carpets over the family graves and were having tea-parties with the dead.

It was dark when, averaging twelve-and-a-half miles an hour, the overloaded truck jolted into Yezdikhast, which means "God willed it." This amazing village consists of tiers of mud-built hovels projecting from either side of a boat-shaped rock some hundred and fifty feet high, which stands in the middle of a ravine,

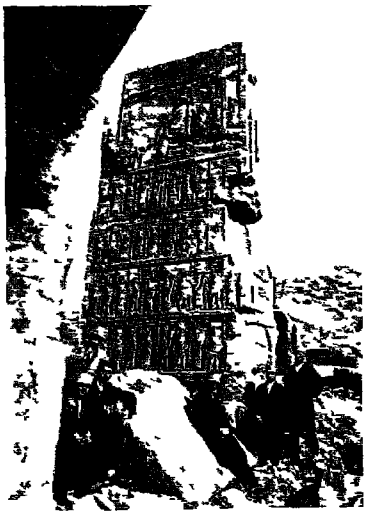
once the boundary between Fars and Iraq. It is a gash in the earth, perhaps a hundred feet deep and two hundred and fifty yards across. Entrance to the houses, which hung like bird-cages far above our heads, is obtained by a bridge of rafters from the "mainland." This can be drawn up at night and it admits to a single tunnel-like street, between the crazy houses, which are rapidly falling down, and off which, in a high wind, children are continually blown. From the pointed end of the rock, in 1779, Zeki Khan caused eighteen villagers to be thrown because they refused to pay the exorbitant taxation imposed upon them. The last victim happened to be a Sayed, whose death so incensed the Khan's own soldiers that they cut the ropes of his tent while he was asleep and the villagers stabbed him to death as he struggled under the canvas.

In this most unsuitable spot, the driver, by this time wild-eyed and stammering, proposed to spend the night. "There are robbers on the road," he said without the slightest truth, but his miserable passengers rebelled.

"He wants to smoke opium," explained the Arab, and even the Persian lady burst into speech. For protection against the imaginary robbers, three soldiers were piled on top of the heaped mass within the wire grid which enclosed the truck at sides and back. The driver, forced from his "dreams of a soul's disentanglement," flung himself on to the seat beside me, and with a screech of gears we bumped into the night.

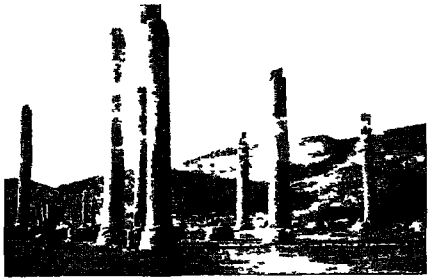
Bruised and breathless, I held on with both hands while we charged what appeared to be an endless series of walls and ditches, for, owing to the weight of the lorries which transport all goods from the Persian Gulf inland, the roads are little more than a miscellany of holes interspersed with rocks.

At intervals, the Arab murmured information. "All drivers on the southern roads take opium or cocaine, otherwise their nerve would break. On the Shiraz-Bushire road, which is the worst in the world, there is one pass called 'the old woman,' with a hundred and

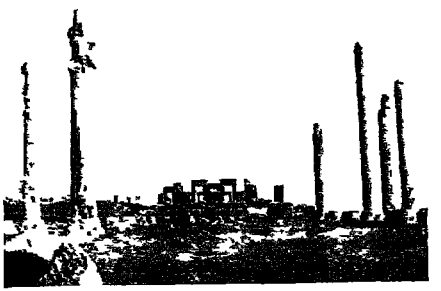


DOORWAY TO THE HALL OF HUNDRED COLUMNS

(The carving represents Darius receiving nobles in audience, about 500 B C)



THE HALL OF HUNDRED COLUMNS



THE PALACE OF DARIUS FROM THE HALL OF HUNDRED COLUMNS

THE HALL OF AUDIENCE: PORCH OF XERXES, WITH THE BULLS, DERIVED FROM NINEVEH, FACING WEST, FROM WHENCE CAME ALL ARMIES

AMONG THE RUINS OF PERSEPOLIS

thirty-two (hairpin) turns in eight miles, and at each turn a lorry must back ten or eleven times to get round."

After this I no longer wondered at the driver's nerves. By the time we reached Abadeh, the little man was in a state of frenzy. He crashed on his brakes in the middle of what appeared to be a rubbish-heap and left us for the nearest hovel where he could get a pipe. It was midnight. The village was deserted. We could hardly distinguish the outline of the mushroom-domed booths wherein are made carved sherbet spoons of pear and boxwood, the bowls as transparent as paper. The Arab however proved invaluable. With his help the Persian lady and I found refuge in the telegraph khané, where we were regaled with "dogh," made of curdled sheep's milk, and where the jackals kept us awake with their pressing attentions.

Next day we were supposed to reach Shiraz by sunset, but it took some time to find the driver and more to rouse him from his poppy dreams. We jolted forth about eight a.m., and since the overloaded truck had to be refreshed with water every half-hour and Jehu would have gone mad had he been refused his midday pipe, sunset found us no further than Persepolis.

The palaces of Darius and Xerxes loomed above the plain. In the hall of a hundred columns, Alexander feasted his successful generals after the conquest of the known world. And on the lowest step of the great double flight, below the porch with the winged bulls derived from Nineveh, which lead to the "Great Kings'" hall of audience, sat a dervish. With his knife he tried to open a soda-water bottle for me and the result was a deep cut along his wrist. We all saw it. The blood dripped on to the bottle and stained the label. Then the dervish pressed his thumb along the cut and it disappeared. In its place there was a faint purple mark. "That is common work," said the Arab. "These men are holy and can control the flowing of their blood." Well, if it was a trick it was a good one, for the bottle was still smeared with red.

The first sight of Shiraz from the Teng Allahu Akbar

Pass is supposed to elicit the exclamation "God is Great!" from the lips of the grateful traveller who, after three hundred and fifteen miles of desert, looks down on the gardens of the poets' city.

"The Kazvinis steal our hearts, the Tabrizis have lips like sugar

"Beautiful are the Isfahanis, but I am the slave of Shiraz."

Sadi and Hafiz, best-loved of Persian philosophic poets, are buried, each in a garden court where, under pomegranates, cypress and orange trees, their admirers drink tea and smoke their water-pipes.

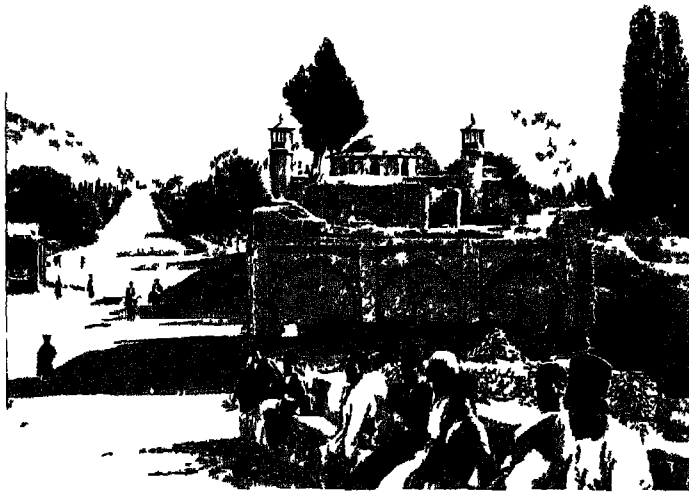
Sadi, Sheikh Maslah ed Din, was born in 1193 and lived to be ninety-eight or a hundred. He led a varied existence, for he made no fewer than fourteen pilgrimages to Mecca, was at one time captured by Crusaders in Palestine and during extended travels in the East he adopted the religion of Vishnu. Later he is supposed to have reverted to Islam and became a Sunni, with the result that a particularly fanatical *Mujtahid* once destroyed his tombstone. Sadi's best-known poems are "The Rose Garden" (Gulestan), "The Fruit Garden" (Bostan) and his Diwan.

Hafiz, or Mohamed Shems ed Din, died at Shiraz in 1388. Of the two he is probably the more popular poet, for though he praised wine, women, music and love, his work has the mystical undercurrent so necessary to the Persian mentality, which is always blaming the cruelty of unresponsive heaven and asking it for reasons. If any word could be found inscribed on a Persian heart, it would be the question "WHY?"

Shiraz is called Dar el Ulm (Seat of Learning), but its people are famous for their convivial habits. All the business of the town, export of tobacco, wine, opium and dried fruits, import of groceries, hardware and piece-goods, is done by strangers. Commerce is in the hands of Jews and of Babis or Bahais, who since the Pahlavi Government wisely removed all restrictions from this much persecuted philosophical sect, represent

THE TOMB OF CYRUS THE GREAT NEAR PERSEPOLIS

Inscription Oh man I am Kurush (Pyrus) the son of Kamujiya (Cambyses) who founded the greatness of Persia and ruled Asia grudge me not this monument"



THE ENTRANCE TO SHIRAZ, THE "SEAT OF LEARNING"

one of the most progressive elements in Persia. The Zoroastrians of Yezd and Kerman are their only rivals in the way of education and a business ability founded on tolerance.

The native Shirazi loathes work and loves a philosophical argument. As soon as he has made a few krans, he borrows some more and, leaving the flat-roofed city, dominated by the domes of three imamadés shaped like the tips of vast asparagus, their blue tiles hoary with grass—a city which knew the mercy of Genghis Khan and the brutality of Tamerlane—he sets forth to some walled garden where, as long as his money lasts, he will sit beside pulsing water under the shadow of fruit-trees, drink, smoke, play the lute and recite poetry with his friends.

In such a setting, I had a two-hour conversation with the General commanding at Shiraz. It is the avowed intention of the present government "to eliminate Russian influence in the North and British in the South." With the latter object in view the first order of this particularly keen soldier was that none of his officers should hold any communication with foreigners. "For three thousand years we have been lords of Persia," he said; "but during the last century the Persian has been intimidated by foreigners. Only by encouraging a certain arrogance, can we make him realize that he is the heir to a mighty past. Now we are in a half-way stage which is unpleasant, but it is necessary if the Persian, who is gentle by nature, is to be sure of himself. Civilization is different for every country. For us it must mean a hardening of the national character and a temporary isolation which will make us self-sufficient."

Concerning the chauvinism of Tehran, the *Amir-el-Ashkar* fenced with typical Persian adroitness: "Madame, I am but a simple soldier"; but when, at the end of our verbal battle, I asked him if he had visited the tomb of Hafiz, his whole face changed. "How could I fail to do that?" he exclaimed, and the poet leaped to life in the soldier. So it is with the older generation of

Persians, but, among the younger, the talk is generally of money. It is exceedingly expensive to turn the East into the West, and the Pahlavi Government is determined to do it in one generation.

But the native Shirazi, remembering the days when "Shiraz was Shiraz and Cairo one of its suburbs," is less interested in economies and the introduction of civilization by means of a standardized dress, than he is in wine, women and song. Since the days when a conqueror demanded two hundred maunds'* weight of eyes as punishment for the town's defiance, and the women of Shiraz had to give themselves to his soldiers to save their sight, they have been reputed exceedingly free in their morals. In this pleasure-loving town, the chadour is very short, flesh silk stockings are at a premium, small feet are thrust into the highest-heeled shoes and the ruband (a long white veil) is so cleverly manipulated that it suggests an invitation.

* A maund weighs thirteen-and-a-half pounds.

CHAPTER XII

THE DESERT WAY TO YEZD—CITY OF THE FIRE-WORSHIPPERS

WITH four patched tyres and a double load, the only lorry driver in Shiraz sufficiently optimistic to attempt the direct trans-desert route to Yezd, started on his hazardous enterprise. A pickaxe, a long-handled spade and approximately a quarter of a mile of rope were tied to the buffers, but the jack was broken. I discovered the damage when the first antediluvian tyre burst and we had to dig a hole in the road in order to change it. This took three hours. Consequently we spent the night in an exceedingly dirty village, where the headman welcomed me with the startling announcement, it being then about eleven p.m.: "It is a good morning. Bravo." These words he repeated at intervals while we picked our way across a yard encumbered with sleeping forms, human and animal, up a flight of two-foot steps and on to a roof where, amidst a litter of scarlet bedding, the favoured slept in close proximity. Persian hospitality is boundless and I found myself sharing the mattress of a pale and beautiful woman with green eyes, presumably from the Caucasus, until sunrise cleared the roof. I was then presented with onions, goats' cheese and sheets of bread, washed down with excellent tea, before being speeded with the same—now apposite—sentence.

For several hours we bumped on a remarkably resistant axle down the main road. Then we turned East across a plain, cut by irrigation channels and low mud walls. Over and through these we plunged, sometimes pushed by amiable natives in blue robes and comfortable turbans. For miles we jolted down the centre of a dry river bed, negotiating rocks with tank-like energy.

A new guide was necessary every few miles, for the "road" was scarcely even a camel-track, and I was amused to see that these came armed and bargained for payment in advance.

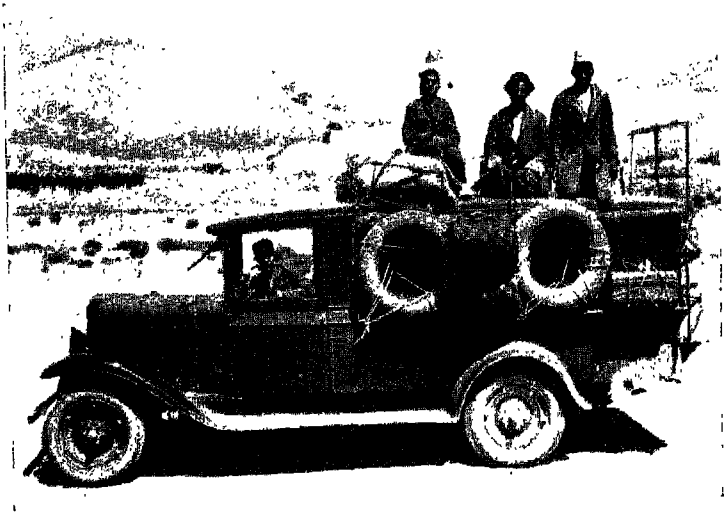
At Abarguh, a straggling village on the edge of the salt desert, we fortified ourselves with tea and filled our empty petrol tins with water, for there are no wells in the next seventy miles.

"Keep to the left of the white rock," urged the onlookers, but as soon as we were out of sight of the fort, a sand-storm whirled up like a column of London fog and the mountains on the other side of the desert were blotted out. Camel skeletons marked the track, and a few, still reared on their hind legs, looked particularly grim as they loomed out of the storm.

"This is an evil road," explained the driver, as we lurched over the crackling red earth, coated with salt. "There is but one landmark between the ranges and that is the ruin called Kaleh Khun" (the fort of red blood), "because robbers used to live there, but now the well is dry and it is deserted."

As suddenly as it had arrived, the storm gathered itself up and departed. All around us was crisp, salt-coated desert, hard on top and dangerously soft underneath. Just as I remarked that no white rock was in sight, the wheels slipped round and we sank slowly on to one side.

It took us exactly five hours to unload the great bales of tea and candles, dig a trench under the sunken wheels, take them off, sink the more solid merchandise under the axles, lever up the lorry by slow inches on blocks of wood, replace the wheels and crawl out of the trench on the solid foundation of tea. By the time the operation was completed, it was ten p.m. We slept for two hours and then began to reload. Fortunately there was a full moon, but, as usual, the driver and his assistant had brought no food and I had to share my inadequate rations. Worse still, most of the water had been upset when we sank into the desert and the radiator demanded the rest.



BEFORE CROSSING THE DESERT BETWEEN SHIRAZ AND YEZD

SUNK IN THE SALT DESERT BETWEEN SHIRAZ AND YEZD

By four a.m. we had pushed, hauled and levered on our aching backs the last bale into place. Crawling exhausted in front of them, we prepared to start. There was a slither of ungripping wheels, a jerk and a skid. Ten yards farther on we heeled right over and sank once more into the salt. We looked at the wreckage and decided on sleep.

Fortunately at eight a.m. half a dozen Khamsa tribesmen arrived with a couple of donkeys and a little water in long-necked clay jars. Breakfast consisted of the local bread which tastes of wood ash and sand. All day we worked to straighten the lorry and by sunset our trenches were reminiscent of Flanders. The tribesmen helped and it was on their shoulders that the truck was finally lifted into position.

In spite of my impassioned protests, all the bales were replaced, and having poured our last water into the radiator, we started once again. But as soon as the tribesmen ceased from pushing, we heeled over into the softest place we had yet struck. This time the mudguards went out of sight and our volunteer helpers followed suit, saying that, when they reached the next village some thirty miles away, they would send "an army" to help us.

Meanwhile, it rained and we had no shelter, for the lorry was at an angle which prohibited entry, even had we been able once more to remove the load. Without food or drink, we lay down on the lee side and the gale which succeeded the rain froze us till the sun rose. Then we began to suffer, for without shade and without water, we spent the whole of that day—the fourth since leaving Shiraz—exposed to a hot wind in a temperature of 105° F. By the end of the afternoon we were incapable of movement and the only touch of humour, barring the mirage which offered distorted visions of lakes and moving objects that might mean help, was the notice branded on the candle-boxes: "These goods must be kept in a cool place."

Just before sunset, when I was so giddy I could hardly see, the impossible happened. A car contain-

ing a party of merchants bound for Yezd halted beside us. These good Samaritans gave us sour milk and cheese—pilau we couldn't manage in our parched condition—and then, piling us somewhere among their water-pipes and other baggage, they drove us across the remaining desert. The only living thing we saw for fifty miles was a wolf standing over a skeleton which he had picked clean.

On we went into the mountains, where the track played leap-frog with all sorts and conditions of obstacles, ditches, mud-banks, soft sand and rocks.

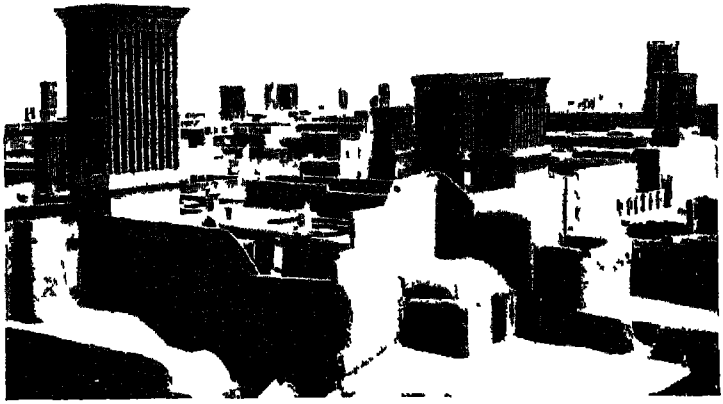
"Look out," shouted the driver; "here comes the Father of Dust."

The merchants seized coats and abbas, but, before they could put them on, we were enveloped in a shrieking whirl of sand which nearly tore the hood off the car. It was impossible to see or steer. The driver lost the way, but having jolted us into standing corn, he surmised the existence of a village. So, after stumbling blindly through the gale and into every sort of dirt, we found refuge about midnight in the caravanserai at Quhtal.

Here I was offered a choice between "a clean room with several most respectable men, one of them a Mullah," and the sole rights in a stable. I chose the latter and having bargained for a late start "not one minute earlier than nine hours," I went to sleep on the floor. While it was still dark someone shook my shoulder. "It is past nine. Why will you not wake?" repeated an exasperated voice, and there was the driver pointing to the waning stars and urging me not to keep "their honesties, the noted merchants," waiting.

It was only then I remembered that the Persian counts the hours from after sunset or sunrise, so that to my companions nine o'clock meant four a.m.

All the inhabitants of the caravanserai watched my dressing and bid for places at the grilles which took the place of windows, but the morning offered no further adventures and towards noon we left the red desert with its mountains so inclined that they look like wave after wave of receding breakers, and came to



WIND TOWERS AT YEZD

ZOROASTRIAN WOMEN AT YEZD

Yezd, where a large proportion of the inhabitants are Zoroastrians.

The women are unveiled and remarkably intelligent. The older ones have shrewd amusing faces and their speech is decisive and full of humour. They wear a striped red and brown or red and purple robe over dark trousers, with a surcoat of some brilliant colour reaching to the knees. Their unpainted faces are framed in a wimple of patterned red surmounted by a rolled crimson turban, one end hanging down the back.

At first sight Yezd has the appearance of a crowded factory site, for its flat roofs are dominated by scores of what might be chimneys. These are the famous Badgirs or wind-towers. Each house has one, so that the inhabitants may be cool on the hottest days. The towers are narrow and slatted on all four sides. They rise straight out of an inner room, with a tank sunk in the middle of the paved floor, so that a current of wind is induced and driven down on to the heads of the smokers or tea-drinkers clustered round the water.

Beyond the walls of Yezd, on the first dark breakers of rock, are the Towers of Silence wherein the Zoroastrians expose their dead. Above them hover expectant vultures and below are the domed "Houses of the Dead," each one belonging to a separate village, where the mourners light the eternal fire and the priests of a three-thousand-year-old religion chant their litanies in Zend.

At Yezd I stayed in the hospitable house of the Khan Bahadur Abul Qassem Moani, Chief of the merchants, and was by him introduced to many Zoroastrians, one of whom, Khoda Yar (Friend of God), took me to see the fire temples. Here in an inner room, sometimes behind a grille, smokeless fire, fed with sandalwood and aromatic herbs, burns night and day on a tall tripod. It is tended by priests (muhbars), who are supposed to wear white (but those I saw were in ordinary European suits) and who veil the lower part of their faces with a white scarf so that the purity of the fire may not be contaminated by breath.

By his ancient law the Zoroastrian is not allowed to smoke or to blow upon any flame, but it is inexact to call him a fire-worshipper, for he uses the flame as a symbol, like the Christian cross or the black stone in the Kaaba at Mecca. He believes in one God, called Ormuzd, and in an Evil Spirit, Ahriman, between which principles of good and evil there is eternal war. Man can enlist on either side he chooses and according to his deserts, he reaches heaven or hell, but these are states or conditions of thought rather than places, and there is no reincarnation of the body.

According to Khoda Yar, stealing, lying, adultery, polygamy, the drinking of araki (spirit) or the eating of meat are forbidden to Zoroastrians, but nursing mothers and fighters with the sword are exempted from the last condition. Even these must refrain from meat on the second, twelfth, fourteenth and twenty-first days of the solar month, which are "angel-days," specially under the protection of Bahman, the angel of flocks, Shahriwar, angel of jewels and gold, Amurdad of trees, Sahpandibaz of the earth, and others, each of whom is the guardian of a particular month. The names of children are decided by an astrologer within twenty-four hours of their birth and the parents have no voice in the matter. The popular belief is that on the fourth day after death, the angel Rashu visits the spirit, and in a scale weighs the good and bad deeds committed on earth, after which judgment is given.

Khoda Yar showed me, bound round his waist, the cord worn by all of his faith. It consists of seventy-two different fibres woven into twelve strands, each four of which are further plaited, so that the girdle appears to consist of three ropes, symbolizing good thoughts, good words and good deeds. When a boy is solemnly invested with this girdle, he is a member of "those of the good religion" and he must learn how to tie the elaborate knot with which the belt is re-fastened after each of the five daily prayers.

A curious rite connected with the belief that blood is unclean, sequestrates women during their periods of

menstruation. For seven days no woman in this condition may touch anybody or anything. Until recent years they were exiled from their houses and took refuge in a special yard attached to the temple and guarded by twenty-foot walls. Food was handed in through a hole, at arm's length, and great care was taken to avoid contact even with the clothes of the recipient. At Yezd, the older women still frequent this grim retreat and the younger ones spend their time of banishment in a special room which no one else is allowed to enter.

The Zoroastrians pray five times a day, before and at sunrise, at noon, before and after sunset. During the services, which take place at those hours in the temples, the eternal fire is exposed to the worshippers, but contrary to the usual ordinance, in Yezd, women are not allowed to participate. Otherwise, they have equal rights with men. Girls and boys go to school at the same age, about seven, and the former can choose their own husbands and manage their own property. The marriageable age for girls is fourteen. A priest cannot marry until he is thirty and his wife must be twenty-one.

When a youth wants to marry, his mother or sister goes to the house of the intended bride with a tray of sweetmeats, Ju-ju (a small fruit supposed to come from paradise), Abshaan (the seed of a green vegetable), and a pomegranate. If the gift is accepted, youth and maiden write each other formal and somewhat hyperbolic letters explaining why they are willing to accept each other: "because your family is a noble one and you are of known honesty." Subsequently, at a ceremony in the girl's house, the intended bridegroom puts a ring on the little finger of the girl's right hand and this completes the engagement. On the wedding day a "da-muhbar" (a special priest who represents ten others) goes to the bride with seven witnesses and in their presence, asks her three times: "Are you willing to be married to So-and-so?" If she agrees, the priest takes the news to the bridegroom, waiting with his assembled friends, and his sister promptly goes to fetch the bride. Hand in hand they walk through the narrow

streets of Yezd between towering mud walls held apart by arches, and each house they pass must kindle fire. Ju-ju, abshaan and sweets are poured over the bride's head for honesty, freshness and good temper. The bridegroom, waiting on his threshold, leads her three times round the sacred fire kindled on a tripod in the court of his house, after which, in his own room, surrounded only by women, the married couple drink sherbet, each from a glass held by the other.

Before sunrise next morning the parents send gifts to their daughter and at the same early hour there is a ceremonial ablution. For three days the bride does no work. Then she must go to the kitchen and cook food for her husband, for this is part of the duty of every Zoroastrian woman, however rich.

When a fire-worshipper dies, his friends and business associates assemble at his house before sunrise and after eating his bread, which contains salt, they announce that for anything he may have done against them he is fully pardoned. Then the body, wrapped in white, is taken to a special yard with two doors signifying that life has two gates, of entry and of exit, and after ten minutes of prayer, it goes across the desert to the Towers of Silence. Here, friends and relatives pour wine over it and drink to the departed soul out of brass bowls with healths to the dead engraved round the rim, while fire is kindled in small blue saucers at every house where the dead man visited.

At the New Year all able-bodied Zoroastrians go out to the Towers of Silence to mourn the conquest of Persia by the Arabs more than a thousand years ago. In the summer they celebrate the retaking of their country which, however, remained fanatically Moslem, so that followers of the older faith were, until recently, forced to wear a distinguishing yellow robe. They might not ride horses and they had to dismount from their donkeys when they met a Moslem. They might not wear socks or roll their turbans, or build two-storied houses, or own landed property. Like the Jews, who, twenty years ago, had to wear a patch on the front of

their coats, they were liable to every form of persecution, but since the removal of all restrictions, they have become the largest merchants and contractors in the province, distinguished alike for their honesty and business ability.

The majority of the Yezd Moslems are still fanatical. The women are strictly veiled and the better-class ones rarely leave their houses except for a drive to the delightful gardens of Rahmat-i-bad, where, under a welter of white roses, vines and apricot trees, they spend the evenings seated on a square wooden divan, eating fruit, smoking, and listening to the nightingale.

In such a garden I talked with an old Moslem who wore a long white shirt, white cotton cap and slippers, while his wife was dressed in the famous Yezd silk which is exported to India, though it is made from yarns originating in Bombay. The daughters of the house brought trays heaped with mulberries, apricots and cucumbers. A tank was sunk in the middle of a thicket of vines and roses, and from the flat roof of the house, there was a view of other gardens, like a green carpet, spread on the plain. North and south the mountains rise so suddenly out of the sand that they are like tidal waves stemmed by some irresistible force and piled back upon each other in a series of breakers.

In a Persian garden there is complete leisure. The night falls softly and the nightingales begin to sing. Nobody moves except to replenish a water-pipe, or offer another glass of tea. The Persians talk well because they are never in a hurry and they make use of similes to express their fecund ideas. On that particular evening we spoke of feminine education, to which the majority of Yezdis were opposed because girls who go to school do not want to wear the veil.

My hostess, who had beautiful thick black hair plaited on either side of her face, and immense kohl-stained eyes, wore a transparent chiffon chadour which trailed on the ground over a cotton frock barely reaching her knees. Her manners were composed and her stillness suggested a natural content. "Most of the older women cannot read or write," she told me; "yet

they are quite happy. My mother was married when she was only eight, but we shall not give our daughters till they are nearly double that age."

I wondered how the two girls, with their European frocks and flying pigtails, who had learned gymnastics and games, would appreciate the chadour and the anderun.

"If they live in Yezd, they must veil," explained their mother, "otherwise they would be friendless. The Yezdis stick to the old ways. Why, even now, the Bahais dare hardly acknowledge their faith, and the Jews, who are all very poor, live in a special quarter from which they rarely emerge. The best school belongs to the Zoroastrians and they are willing to take Moslem pupils, but it is difficult, for the old-fashioned Mohamedans won't eat with a fire-worshipper."

"What will your girls do in the anderun after the active school life to which they've been accustomed?" I asked, and my hostess sighed.

"It is hard on them," she said, "but we are midway between two states. Perhaps it will be better for their children"; and she explained that in Yezd the majority of merchants still had three or four wives.

The big families buy their rice, grain and groceries once a year. Such stores are handed over to the wife and she apportions them as required. The daily marketing is done by a special man who presents his bills to the husband. The wife handles no money except the monthly allowance which she receives for dress and bath.

Three days a week the public baths are reserved for women, and at certain hours, favoured by the ladies of the anderun, the entrance fee is raised to one toman (3s. 4d.). The merchants' wives are followed to the bath by servants carrying jars of rose-water, and within the steam-filled building, they can indulge in massage or hairdressing, they can drink tea and smoke kalyans, have their nails hennaed, or their lids kohled, and hear all the gossip of the town.

Otherwise they only leave the anderun (harem)—which is often a separate house with its own central court planted with trees and flowers—to visit an occa-

sional friend. The dressmaker comes to them. So does the fortune-teller, the perfumer and the seller of sweets, silks and muslins. The women of Yezd order the meals and superintend the kitchen with the help of three or four maidservants, but they have no dealing with the man's portion of the house, which is looked after by male domestics. They are allowed to see the men who have married into their own families as well as their husbands' brothers and other near relations, which is advanced in comparison with the princely families of Isfahan, among whom a man may not see his sister-in-law.

Some years ago, even the few miles of road to Rahmat-i-bad were unsafe without a large escort. My host told me how, before the Pahlavi Government established complete security by means of regularly paid, well-armed, and well-mounted road-guards, he was returning from his farm outside Yezd, when he was set upon by bandits from a band numbering about a hundred and sixty, who had been systematically holding up all caravans for twenty-four hours, and robbed of money, clothes and boots. In company with other captives, he was forced to walk for thirty miles into the mountains, and left without food or water to find his way back barefoot.

For the security of the roads and the development of communications, the townsfolk of Yezd give full credit to the present government, but, owing to the ban on the purchase of foreign drafts with which to pay for imports, the merchants are doing no business, and unemployment is rife.

For instance, there are in Yezd three thousand "factories," i.e. small cellars below the level of the street, approached through doors barely two-and-a-half feet high, where silk and cloth are woven on hand looms, to the accompaniment of a caged nightingale. But Persia makes no cotton yarn. The imported stocks are rapidly decreasing and the price rises each week, with the result that many of these factories are closing.

The dyers are in the same condition and half of the inhabitants of Yezd seem to be walking about the

bazaars with arms tinted scarlet, orange and blue. There is no work to keep them in their vaulted chambers where the smoking cauldrons are almost empty, and in place of the brilliant bundles heaped round a tank of goldfish, there are only a few skeins.

When I was in the town, consternation reigned because the merchants had just been informed that within the next three days they could buy rupees or sterling to pay for goods ordered before February 25th, providing proof were available concerning the date of such orders. Not one of the dealers in piece-goods, motor spares, groceries and hardware had kept a copy of his orders, so, instead of being called upon to issue drafts for several lacs of rupees, the bank was getting off with a few thousand, and discontent clamoured in the markets.

The new high tax on motors (£2 a month) was restoring to favour the older methods of transport and the caravanserais were full of dark-skinned camels, but the most amusing thing in the bazaars, where every second shop displays elaborate sweetmeats, erections in crystallized sugar and heaps of yellow rose-petals, are the rows of round mud ovens with fires inside. Beside each such bakery is a tray on which boys knead the dough into round cakes. These are handed to the first baker who slaps them, one at a time, on to a slightly convex shape covered with damp canvas. A sweep of his expert hand rolls the dough off in the form of a sheet which he flaps on to a shovel, held by the second baker, who flings it over the top of the fire, flat against the concave wall of the oven, where it adheres. After a few seconds it is baked and whisked out and into the hands of the waiting purchaser. The whole operation takes a quarter of a minute, and the bakers, stripped to the waist, tie black scarves over their heads and the lower parts of their faces to prevent hair or beards getting singed. No wheeled traffic may pass through the streets of the old town, and at night the main illumination comes from the hurricane lamps slung at every corner. Under each low archway a shop is tucked away, and after

sunset it glows with the light of a wax taper stuck in a lantern, while another flicker shows a flight of steps descending to one of the domed cisterns which are a feature of Yezd. It is said that a German company is to introduce electricity into a town whose walls are held up with arches and whose roofs crumble whenever there is a snowstorm. But at present, modernity is expressed by the enterprise of half a dozen Moslem merchants, led by the Khan Bahadur Abul Qassem, who are taxed on turn-over, not on profits, and who pay triple rates because they are also commission agents and dealers in exchange, and by the Zoroastrians, who are cheerful, kind and helpful and whose quarter has a clean and prosperous appearance.

Outside Yezd, the country looks as if it had been systematically shelled, for there is no water in the plain, on which, without apparent reason, the city sprang into existence when the Arab conquest drove the fire-worshippers from Media and Hyrcania. The supply is brought from the mountains thirty-six hours away by means of Kanats—underground canals with every few yards a vent-hole surrounded by heaped earth, through which in spring the channels can be cleaned. The Kanats belong to many different families and are sold or rented by the Jura. A hundred and thirty Juras run to Yezd every day and a popular form of dowry is to give a daughter so many hours of water on such and such a village, which she can either use, or rent at the rate of a hundred and fifty tomans (£25) a year for two hours water per day.

CHAPTER XIII

ACROSS THE SEA OF SAND TO BALUCHISTAN

WITH the help of the Khan Bahadur I secured a seat on a lorry laden with asafœtida for India. The smell was almost suffocating, but, fortunately, lest the cargo should foment, we left Yezd after the worst heat of the day was over.

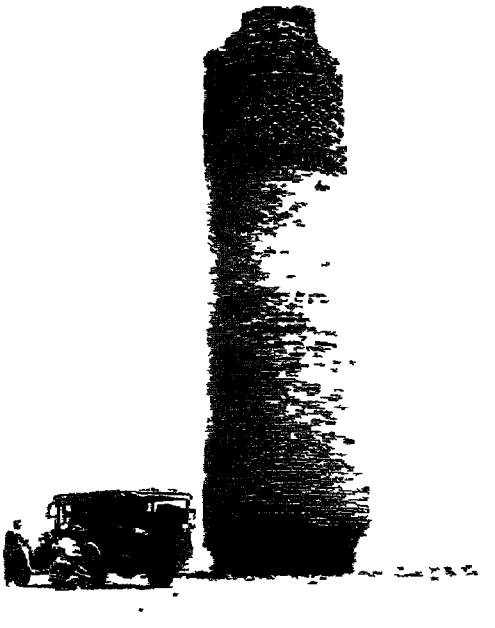
In starlight the desert became mysterious, and a caravanserai where we stopped to eat bread, eggs and onions, acquired the aspect of a stage castle.

We spent what the drivers optimistically referred to as "the night," i.e. four hours in the middle of it, at Rafsinjan. It was two a.m. when we arrived, and the labyrinthine alleys between towering mud walls were deserted. Muharram, the month of mourning, was approaching and black draperies fluttered from the hands of Fatima, which the faithful suspended above their portals.

I had a letter from the Khan Bahadur to a Hadji* whose courtesy was proof against being roused in the middle of the night by thundering blows on his door. When the small boy who had materialized out of a dust heap in order to guide me had shrieked an explanation of my presence, Blue-Beard himself unbarred the entrance. A vast figure, rendered prodigious by the amount of trousers, beard and turban which loosely draped it, led me into a courtyard, where a row of bolsters neatly arranged under a portico turned out to be the family asleep. A woman roused herself to spread another carpet, and when I asked for water, she lifted a portion of paving-stone which acted as a plug, whereupon a spring bubbled out, obviously suggesting a bath —but Blue-Beard watched, so I joined the prostrate.

* One who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

A WINDMILL WITH LATERAL SAILS IN SEISTAN



A PILLAR ATTRIBUTED TO NADIR SHAH
IN THE DASHT-I-LUT DESERT

By sunrise these human bolsters must have dispersed, for when I woke, it was to find the courtyard clear of bedding and a quantity of women regarding me with expectant interest. Before I had shaken myself into the realization of another day, the Hadji summoned me to breakfast, cheese, eggs, honey and a sour junket called mast, after which, since I could not accept his generous invitation to stay for a week, or a month, or as long as Allah willed, he replaced me on the lorry with a handkerchief full of "smiling" pistachio nuts.

Rafsinjan is famous for its pistachios and the best are cracked at the side so that the kernel smiles through the rind.

As we jolted slowly across the desert in which the Persian towns are planted, so many patches of green and blue let into hundreds of arid miles, with collections of castellated walls and tiled domes set upon the interminable sand as a child might lay out its toys, I learned that out of every seven able-bodied men at Rafsinjan, one is employed for ten months of the year in cleaning out the Kanats, of which there are four hundred and fifty miles. In this district irrigation costs approximately £20 an acre against the average of 7s. 6d. paid in India. The province spends nearly half a million yearly on the upkeep of the Kanats, which are five hundred years old and which run for some twenty miles underground before they reach the "tarum" or wet strata where the water begins to seep through the earth.

The domed roofs of Kerman look as if they have been blown out of a bowl of soap bubbles. The town is tucked away under one of the usual reddish-black ranges, barren beyond description. The hills have the quality of arrested breakers, like those near Yezd, for they hurl themselves out of the desert one after another, each peak leaning against the next, but none with any more solid foundation than an angry sea—in this case of sand. Within the walls of the privileged, there is the precious green of gardens. Pylons of white roses are massed under domes that apparently reflect the sky. The air in Persia is so thin and clear that all colours

acquire an exaggerated significance. Nowhere is this phenomenon more apparent than in Kerman, which, flattened by the gesture of an angry colossus, would be no more than a heap of rubble, whereas swelling, earthen, out of the earth, it has an original and interesting character.

I sat on the roof of the Madrasseh Ibrahim Khan with a Zoroastrian who had been educated in Europe, and watched the miracle of sunset behind the domes of Kuba-i-Sebj. A few wind-towers stood up above the bubble roofs, and outside the town some curious conical ice-houses were reminiscent of Egyptian pyramids. Below me, a tank was surrounded first by pomegranates and then by blue and yellow tiling in a row of recessed porches, each roofed with honeycomb groining. In most of these sat professors and students, their missals open before them, opium pipes in their hands.

Not very far away, a crowd of women gathered on a flat roof to listen to the story of Husayn. The Imam who recited it was among the men in the court below, and the massed black and white of the listening women hung over the parapet, motionless and deeply moved. The Zoroastrian shrugged impatient shoulders. "All that has no place in the new Persia," he said. "How can they compete with Europe if they are tied by such superstitions?" and he told me about the younger Moslems who came out of the colleges at Tehran and Isfahan prepared to live as Europeans in a district which would rather bear any evil to which it was accustomed than sample something new.

"First of all there is friction between fathers and sons. A boy comes back to his home wearing a European suit, ready to sit on a chair and eat off a table, and at first his father says nothing at all. The boy imagines he is going to get work, but there is no opportunity for the over-educated. We have no industries here, and for every place in an office there are twenty applicants. The student soon finds himself out of place and uncomfortable. If he marries, his wife doesn't understand his ideas. Gradually he feels the pressure of

family opinion. His father tells him he is a fool. After a few months he finds himself with his feet tucked under him and then he begins to think that European clothes are pretty uncomfortable. Just in the house, he'll go back to the old ways and there'll be no more discussion and disapproval. Probably, because he's disillusioned, he takes to opium. What else is there for him to do? This place is at the end of the world. Beyond those hills there's nothing but sand—a thousand miles of it before you come to India." The Zoroastrian shrugged again. "A man must either get out of here quickly, get back to Isfahan or Tehran, where they understand the new ways, or he'll be forced back again into the old."

Kerman is famous for its carpets (in which trade about thirty thousand people are employed), its extreme poverty, its sloth and the frivolity of its women, most of whom wear white chadours—"Because they are much less respectable than black ones."

Here the "mutta," or temporary marriage, is habitual. It was originally invented for the benefit of pilgrims to the holy cities of Kerbela and Najaf and it entails a fee to the Mullah who performs the ceremony, and one to the father of the unfortunate bride—who is often only nine years old—but no further obligation is incurred by the man. The mutta marriage is valid for a week, a month or a year, according to the contract, and subsequently the woman may not re-marry for three months.

The majority of Kermanis smoke opium, with the result that their skins have a green or leaden hue, and they are such habituals that they scrape out the waste which drops to the bottom of the pipe-bowl, boil it and chew it, with disastrous results, for this is the crudest of all opium products.

Wages average tenpence a day and the people live on bread, which has a considerable amount of chopped straw in it, relieved by a little green stuff if the locusts have spared any. A proverb describes the poverty of Kerman with the phrase: "Nothing but kushk in the town." Kushk is the refuse which remains after *mast*

has been made out of goat, sheep or buffalo milk. All firewood has been cut within twenty or thirty miles, so during the severe winters, there is nothing to heat the mud houses. For cooking, the women use sprigs of liquorice plant and ephreda, from which the very valuable drug ephedrine, used in the treatment of asthma, may be extracted. The latter grows wild in the hills and represents a potential source of wealth.

Thirty years ago, Kerman was famous for its hand-woven shawls. These were always included in dowries and given as presents at the New Year, but fashion has changed and the trade is at an end.

The district suffers from its isolated position. It is far from the capital and no great trade route passes through it. Consequently, the prices of imported goods fluctuate to an astonishing extent. If a lorry happens to arrive with a load of tea, it may be bought in the bazaar for a sixth or a tenth of the previous day's price, but owing to the heavy taxation, nearly all of which is spent outside the province, Kerman, like many other provincial Persian towns, is too poor to buy imported goods.

Some years ago it was one of the nine governorates which the Bakhtiari Chiefs regarded as perquisites. The Khan used to make a leisurely progress from the West with three hundred horsemen, allotting the various minor posts on his route to followers, all of whom were on the make, so that, for generations, the province has been drained of money. The Governors of those days expected to make at least £50,000 out of their eighteen months' reign, whereas the present man is paid approximately £132 a month, and finds it difficult to make both ends meet.

A committee was recently appointed to inquire into the graft which had become a recognized code in Persia. Consequently, government officials are chary of taking bribes, but as their pay is small and they have no other means of increasing it, there is considerable dissatisfaction with the policy of Tehran. Conscription is probably the most unpopular innovation, and several of the slothful Kermanis committed suicide to avoid

their two years' service. In this department graft is still rife and it is habitual to return those who have paid it as under military age while, in order to balance the figures, ancients with hennaed beards have been rejuvenated to suitable years.

One of the main difficulties of the present government is that the best-educated men will not leave the big towns for exile in the provinces, and at this moment, forty per cent. of the Persian Gulf posts are said to be vacant, it being impossible to find suitable officials to fill them.

Until recently, the Hindoo merchants possessed seventy per cent. of the trade of Kerman, for all the cotton yarn required for carpet making was imported from Manchester (a hundred tons a year) and piece-goods from India, but Russia has recently stepped into the market. At one time, she actually bought Manchester cottons and sold them at a loss in Kerman, but now she is making shirtings and prints in her mills near Leningrad, which are more durable than the British goods, and underselling us by four or five per cent.

The petrol war which rages all over Persia between British and Russian spirit is decided in our favour at Kerman where one thousand five hundred gallons per month of Anglo-Persian petrol are sold against three hundred gallons of the Soviet product. But up till last year Russia had no agencies in the South and she had to contend with the difficulties of lorry transport from the Caspian. Now she has instituted a shipping service from Batoum to the Persian Gulf, and with the aid of the newly-established Shark company, she will be able to distribute her petrol and other goods all over Southern Persia.

Throughout the ages Kerman has suffered from locusts and Baluchis. The former destroyed the crops and the latter carried off the women. There is a Persian proverb which affirms that: "Isfahan will be destroyed by water, Yezd by sand and Kerman by horsehoofs." But, owing to the drastic policy of the Pahlavi Government, it is unlikely that the horsehoofs

will come from Baluchistan. The recent execution of Dhost Mohamed Khan has disposed of the last great tribal leader and raiding has ceased across the Eastern roads, for most of the Baluchis are disarmed. There is still, however, a certain amount of gun-running from Arabia, and whenever Ibn Saud receives a gift of rifles from some sympathetic European power, a large proportion of them find their way across the Gulf. It is probable that the slave-trade, which used to flourish along the coast of Persian Baluchistan with the approval of the late Shah's officials, is still able to supply a certain number of coveted Baluchi slaves to the wealthy families of Oman and Muscat. These are mostly the children of fishermen who, return from the sea to find their wives and families have been carried off in dhows, but the present government, which has achieved in a few years so remarkable an improvement in security, is determined to put an end to this human traffic.

The locusts, however, present a problem which at present is baffling the whole of the Middle East from Syria and Palestine to Central Asia. There are four stages of this plague. When the newly-hatched insects are crawling in vast black hordes, which cover the country like an advancing tide, they can be arrested by deep trenches dug across their route and in these they can subsequently be destroyed by liquid fire, but it is much more difficult to deal with them when they have grown their wings and are flying in hosts as thick as a London fog. In the second stage, when they are green, they strip the land cleaner than any American harvester. Then, a brilliant yellow in the mating season, they lie about in couples, and by then the damage is done. In the last stage they are pale red and near to dissolution, but nobody knows where the old ones go, or from where the hordes come each spring. One theory attributes their origin to Central Nejd, for it was rumoured that a host was encountered flying the Persian Gulf.

At one time the Pahlavi Government offered one kran for seven maunds of locust eggs (three hundred

and thirty maunds equal one ton), and millions were collected, but a thrifty peasantry then refused to kill the females from whom they hoped to derive profit. Now there is a Locust Commission, disposing of a hundred and twenty-three thousand tomans a year, on which students from the Agricultural College at Tehran draw salaries without earning them. Last year, fortunately, there was so much rain that the locusts found sufficient green on the plains and so spared a considerable amount of the crops, while their invasion of Khabbis put an end to the famine, during which a hundred people were dying of starvation every week. Before dawn the locusts are comatose and hunched in great masses which hang from roofs and walls. The inhabitants of Khabbis went out with spades and shovelled them into sacks by the ton, after which they boiled and stored them. When an alarm of plague reached the capital, the doctors who hurried to the remote province, discovered that the villagers were suffering from nothing worse than a surfeit of locusts.

I left Kerman on a carpet lorry driven by an Englishman from the Standard Carpet Factory. He is supposed by the natives to know a "private road" across the dreaded Sea of Sand—the Dasht-i-Lut, which is one of the most desolate regions in the world—because he always manages to cross it in three days to their eight or ten.

The blue domes or minarets, so slender that they appear to be always quivering, disappeared behind us. We drank over-sweet tea at Mahmu, loveliest of Dervish sanctuaries, where a hook-nosed personage in a vast turban showed us the tomb of the sainted Shah Numat Ulla and begged us, "since there is no difference in the world of gnostics," to kiss the marble. Regretfully we left its cypresses and the roses reflected amidst azure tiling in a series of tanks, for Bam, which looks like a slice cut out of Africa. Here the domed mud houses, plastered on either side of a wide dry river, are surrounded with palms and each roof has a queer earthen vent-hole, like the scoops on ocean liners.

Owing to the government monoply, sugar sells in

Kerman and Bam for £60 a ton, whereas it can profitably be produced at a sixth of that price in Java and India; so, as dates contain fifty per cent. of pure sugar it would appear that the revenue of this end-of-the-world province could easily be increased by the institution of a new industry. Eighty per cent. of the sugar consumed in Persia is imported from Russia who, in her turn, buys from France and Germany three quarters of the amount she dumps in Persia under the labels of some refinery in the Ukraine.

The dates grown at Khabbis near Bam are famous, and America once offered to take a three-million-dollar consignment yearly, but the Persians do not know how to pack the fruit and the few cases which arrived at the coast were useless.

Bam welcomed us with the rumour that Baluchi rebels were in force across our route and sped us next day with tales of lorries broken down in the Shurgaz, a dry river-bed, four miles wide, in which the shifting sands are blown into dunes across the track. The best concerned some Persian women who, left with a dozen tins of water, while the driver went to the nearest Amnia post for help, proceeded to wash in it, so that, on his return four days later, he was met by the camel-postmen with the remark: "All your passengers are mad and two of them are dead," but the corpses revived in order to vociferate their abuse.

We departed from Bam at seven a.m., and with its palms and the ancient battlemented castle which looks like a Rackham drawing, we left the world behind us. It was as if we came suddenly to a lunar desolation, but torrid instead of frozen. A wind, whose origin might have been the furnace wherein walked Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, hurried across the molten salt of the Dasht-i-Kavir, drew additional fury from the scorched sands of the Lut and seared our skins, so that we wrapped our heads and shoulders in anything available and stifled under the folds.

At Fareh, a vast pan, eight miles long and ten or twelve broad, had evidently once been part of a river

bed, for it was full of huge mud stumps chiselled by the action of long-vanished water into the forms of castles, pinnacles and towers. From a distance it is impossible to believe that these are not the ruins of some primeval city, for the stumps measure from three to twenty feet in height and are as varied in diameter, but the illusion is subsequently replaced by a feeling that the extraordinary formations can be nothing but gargantuan molars ground down by the labour and the passage of time.

Towards noon, we arrived at the first of the two eighty-foot watch-towers, built according to local legend by Nadir Shah to guide his army on their march to India. These are thirty miles apart and in the days of the Mogul-Persian alliance, beacons flared from what were veritable light-houses in the Sea of Sand. This caravan route, which until the winter of 1929–30 was rarely used by mechanical traffic and owing to the great heat is almost impracticable in summer, is one of the oldest in the world. "By it, Carmania, or the ancient province of Kerman, was linked up with Drangana, or modern Seistan, and thereafter with the several roads through Southern Afghanistan which lead through that country into the Panjab and on to India itself.

"Access to Persia from the East has always been barred by the great 'Lut' desert, all that remains of the bed of a prehistoric sea, which runs almost due south-east from near the Caspian to the arid rocky mountain chains of Baluchistan. In ancient times, one of the three great trade routes which traversed the dread 'Lut' was the one now followed by lorries trading between India and Kerman.

"Known and in use from exceedingly remote times, it was the route by which Alexander the Great's general Craterus was directed to convoy Alexander's war-worn veterans, sick, and women back to Persia, being regarded as the easy route via the valley of the Helmand and Seistan. Along the same route Antiochus the Great marched a great army back to his kingdom, some ninety years later.

"In later Sasanian and Arab times, this route, consequent on the geographical position it occupied in relation to the countries it served, was almost in constant use. In those old-world days, the Baluchi, or, as they were termed by the Arab writers, the 'Balu,' appear to have proved themselves a great terror to the country and a danger to travellers. Mukaddasi, who dates back to some eighty years before the Norman conquest of England, refers to them as men possessed of ferocious countenances, evil hearts, and wanting in both manners and morals.

"How little tribes in the East are affected by the passage of centuries is indicated by the tribal customs which the same Arab geographer describes as prevailing among the wild Baluchi marauders with whom he was brought into contact during his journeys in this country. Nine centuries have elapsed since then, and yet we find these Baluchi to all intents the same and unchanged.

"Although prior to the opening of the Quetta-Nushki-Dusdap railway extension the ancient route continued to be used, for many years before this it had been considered dangerous, owing to the constant depredations suffered at the hands of Baluchi raiding parties.

"Some twenty-five years ago it attracted the attention of the British officer who had charge of the adjoining British frontier line, and, thanks to the good offices which were rendered him by the official in charge of the trans-frontier section of the Indo-European telegraph line, this ancient route, with all its guide towers, old halting stages, caravanserais, and store-houses, now only marked by pathetic half-buried mounds of decaying debris and wind-cut bricks, was found again." *

The writer of this interesting and instructive passage adds that there can be no doubt that the so-called Nadir's towers "were provided with wood-fed flares to guide a traffic which in those days ceased neither by day nor night."

And still, many centuries later, it would be difficult

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to travel without these landmarks, for, between Bam and Dusdap, there is only one village. Then for over two hundred miles there is no other habitation than the four or five mud huts occupied each by a couple of Baluchi road-guards, who are supposed to receive twelve or fourteen tomans a month, but who are lucky if they get two or three after the price of rations is deducted. In midsummer the track is deserted and in winter the springless rivers are torrents and impassable for weeks on end.

The camel-caravan, ousted from the usual Persian roads, comes into its own on this southern edge of the great Dasht-i-Lut. The string, roped head to tail, travels at night, each beast carrying about three hundred and fifty pounds, at eight tomans a kharvar, as against the eighteen tomans for lorry transport. The leading camel carries a chime of small bells and the rear-guard a single deep-toned bell eighteen inches in diameter, whose note must have been the salvation of many an old-time traveller lost in the Sea of Sand.

At Nadir's tower we removed the radiator cap and let half the air out of the tyres. A little further on, while crawling through ridges of soft sand on first speed, the temperature rising towards 120° F., and the engine shrieking its continual protest, we came upon a lorry which had been stranded for four days. Its driver, in rags, was prostrate under a tamarisk bush. We gave him water, flour and cigarettes, but he refused to leave his car.

Two hours later we came to the telegraph hut, which looks like a mushroom embedded at the edge of the Shurgaz. In winter, this shallow depression is a torrent, but when I saw it, the sands were smooth and soft as a cloud-bank. To cross the two hundred odd miles of the "Lut" between Bam and Dusdap, trading lorries are allowed ten days by contract before they lose the reward for swift service, but nobody inquires for them until three or four weeks have elapsed. If the Shurgaz is "in a bad mood," the laden lorries may sink up to the wings and remain thus for several days. Most drivers

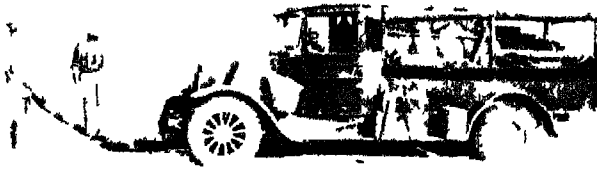
consider a minimum of twelve hours essential for negotiating the six treacherous miles which comprise the depression.

The temperature outside the telegraph hut was 115° F. and there was no chance of the water holding out under it, so we spent a couple of hours with the Baluchi road-guards who amused us with their stories of the "Lut." They said that a tortoise was the spirit of a camel-driver who refused water to a man with a load on his back, so that now for a thousand years he must carry a rock while his pitiless heart beats but three times a minute. Barren women drink water out of a tortoise-shell in order to have children. We learned that no Baluchi would throw away bread, and if he finds a piece by accident, he touches it to head, brow and lips, for it is an omen of plenty. In Baluchistan, black cats are unlucky, for evil men reincarnate as cats. Dogs need not always be unclean, for the telegraphist had once seen a pariah sitting on the cloak of a Mullah. Before he had recovered from his horror, he heard the holy man say: "It does not matter. By the will of Allah, the animal is a goat."

Outside the mushroom hut, a couple of camels groaned protest against the heat, and their owner, wrapped in a chaos of white cotton stuffs, informed us that no sensible camel-men would sell their bells. It would be most unlucky. Owls are also unlucky because they turn into ghouls at night, and it is particularly unfortunate to see a certain kind of snake, for an encounter with a man transforms him into a dragon, complete with legs, after which he is exiled to the mountains, where naturally he takes revenge on humanity. From such old-fashioned talk we returned to our lorry, product of mass-production and the rolling belt, and crawled into the Shurgaz with much the feeling, I imagine, of a doubtful Channel swimmer on a stormy day. But fate was kind—the Baluchis, who came with us and used their spades to excellent effect, reminded us we had seen neither owl nor snake.

We crossed the depression by means of strips of

MR WARD AND THE AUTHOR BEFORE STARTING
FROM KERMAN FOR BALUCHISTAN



CROSSING THE SHURGAZ ON STRIPS OF MATTING

LOCAL TRANSPORT IN BALUCHISTAN

coarse matting, twenty feet long, so arranged that they could not be thrown out by racing wheels as is always the case with sacks. It was slow work, but fortunately a dune which usually lies across the track had been blown away by a recent storm, and after two hours in the river bed we crawled on to harder ground. Spades and matting were packed away and by the second of Nadir's towers, now a mass of fallen bricks, we put up our camp-beds and made a fire to discourage the jackals. A Baluchi on a trotting camel passed us, doing a hundred miles in the twenty-four hours, but in Persia what we call Friday night begins after sunset on Thursday, so it is difficult to calculate time. A solitary locust shared my pillow.

Next morning we reached Gurg (meaning wolves) where a road-guard had killed a man who, while cleaning a rifle, had accidentally shot his brother. The avenger walked into the post and announced what he had done, with the further information: "I am now going out to kill another of the same family. My brother's life is worth two others." Asked why he had not arrested the offender, the remaining Amnia (road-guard) remarked: "Why should I? He was within his right."

The Baluchis are darker than the average Persian, with very white teeth and long hair. Their vitality is unsapped by opium smoking. They have a lust for independence and a contempt for the formulas of civilization. One Pahlavi hat is generally kept in each village and whoever happens to be going into town borrows it for the occasion. Otherwise they wear baggy blue trousers and a long coat with a turban of vast proportion, or a skull cap with a six-inch leather eye-shade tied in front.

On the plateau they are so poor they are often only clothed in sheepskins. Their tents are two strips of tattered goat-hair and there are so few wells that while pasturing their flocks on thorn and scrub, they carry their water in skins slung across the shoulders.

On the third day we left the desert between breakers

of red and grey rock and crept up a gully which, being a natural watershed, is subject to sudden spates. Here after heavy rains or rapidly melting snows, caravans are apt to be overwhelmed between the cliffs and all the beasts drowned.

The tamarisks had been stripped by locusts and the earth was strewn with bones which the driver designated as "spare parts of camels." Two cars cannot pass on the narrow hairpin track which doubles in and out between boulders; and on one miserable occasion, when a couple of lorries met, they stayed there for a fortnight, till a hole had been dug out of the rock sufficiently large for one to be backed into it.

To the top of the pass we crept at two miles an hour, followed by a Baluchi with a mallet which he thrust under a hind wheel whenever the lorry hesitated. And then there was another stretch of desert and another pass, and at last the glaring white plain on which the mountains seem to be glued like cardboard hills on a map.

Before the War, Dusdap, which means "Thieves water," was only a well, at which caravans between Meshed and India were regularly raided, but England pushed the rail-head from Quetta up here to guard the frontier, and a group of merchants followed. To-day there is a cluster of mud bazaars flattened on the blazing plain, with a settled population of perhaps two thousand, Afghans, Baluchis, Sikhs, Turkomans, Persians, Berberis (who were originally Mongols), a few Russians, some Belgians to run the customs, and two Germans to organize the new National Bank, but there is a fluctuating procession of pilgrims, who bid for seats on the north-bound lorries to the Holy City of Meshed, and of Shias bound by way of Quetta and Karachi for their own sacred places, Kerbela and Najaf.

In order to prevent money going out of the country, the Persian Government has refused to issue pilgrim passports for abroad. This is an extremely wise measure, for whole districts used to be impoverished by the Hadj. Families sometimes saved for several generations,

so that, at last, one or two of their descendants might make the coveted pilgrimage to Mecca. In doing so, they spent the couple of thousand tomans representing the thrift of their forbears and returned penniless to their native villages.

Before the institution of the National Bank, pilgrims used to buy rupee drafts from the Imperial Bank of Persia. Lack of capital prevents the new government bank being able to issue these in sufficient quantity, with the result that those travellers or pilgrims who have succeeded in getting passports, are forced to purchase rupees from private sources. It is possible therefore that the story of forged notes of large and small denominations, prevalent on the Baluchistan frontier, was deliberately started in Tehran to stop the private purchase of rupees, but I found the general idea among lorry-travellers was that the counterfeit notes, concerning which the government had issued a warning, were printed in Russia to enable the Soviet to pay its Sikh and other Indian agents. After considerable inquiry, I received proof of the existence of such forgeries and saw one for a hundred rupees which had found its way into the hands of the indignant collector of customs at Dusdap, where, by the way, all travellers are searched, to see if they are taking Persian wealth out of the country.

CHAPTER XIV

WITH A PILGRIM CARAVAN TO THE HOLY CITY OF MESHED

DUSDAP consists of two streets of mud dumplings flattened on the sand, but all around are reddish mountains spurting out of the plain with a suddenness that is disconcerting.

Bearded men in vast unwieldy turbans loom out of *suqs* which look as if they had no permanent intentions. Outside the town, which is still surprised at its own existence, the country must be one of the poorest in the world. Men live like their shrunken flocks, among ranges beautiful with the ambers, crimsons, and saffrons of utter aridity, and the few goats live on nothing at all.

To former dynasties, Baluchistan was the end of the world, but the Pahlavi Government, having successfully disarmed the majority of the tribes, has instituted a police drawn from the local inhabitants and guaranteed by the tribal Sirdars, who are held responsible for the maintenance of order, though the frontier is entirely fictitious and outlaws can range backwards and forwards between India and Persia. In return, it is hoped to get some revenue from the southern area which is capable of being developed for wheat.

The Baluchis believe that they are descended from Koreish, who was exiled from Aleppo by the Khalif Yezd for his defence of Husayn, but differing experts attribute to them a Rajput or a Seljuk Turkoman origin. The majority are Sunnis in name, but they reverence a number of pirs, whose sainted spirits are connected with various pyramids of stones, littered with votive rags. All this borderland between Khorasan and the Persian Gulf is permeated with strange beliefs. It is an uncer-

tain region where men warn each other: "Conceal thy gold, thy destination and thy creed."

At Turbat Kej, the Zikris possess a holy book miraculously communicated. They believe neither in the Koran nor in Mohamed, but they expect the Mahdi to materialize out of a neighbouring mountain, Kuh-i-Murad, the "hill of desire." They cultivate the date by the marriage of palms—the pollen of one male fertilizes thirty females—but only a special man, who has been initiated in certain rites, may consummate the blend.

The Baluchis, said to number a quarter of a million, are as moral as they are superstitious. Their women, who are generally unveiled, have great influence in the tribe and it is not unusual to find a matriarch in undisputed command of a group.

In Seistan, spirit-worship is grafted on to Islam, and the fashion of calling children "Mohamed the Beggar" or "Abdulla the Deformed," to propitiate the evil spirits, has been adopted by neighbouring Baluchis. The children's eyes are blacked and they are made to look as ugly as possible so that djinns will not trouble to steal them. Alms are hastily given to the most repellent beggars in order to forestall their curse. A woman whose child has died believes she is possessed by an evil spirit, so when a neighbour is giving birth, she is apt to go to the house with the charitable intention of inducing the demon by means of shrieks and wails to leave her body for that of the expectant mother, whose child will then be killed, leaving the other woman free.

When I was in Dusdap, Muharram, the month of mourning, was imminent. All over the Islamic world, Shias were preparing to mourn the death of Husayn, son of Ali and grandson of the Prophet Mohamed, who was slaughtered with a handful of followers on the Kerbela plain some twelve hundred years ago. Yearly, his martyrdom is re-enacted in the holy cities of his heretical followers, by means of Tazieh, religious plays in which every aspect of the tragedy is faithfully por-

trayed. It is the ambition of every Shia in North-West India, Afghanistan, Baluchistan or Persia to spend Muharram in Meshed. Consequently, at this time all the lorries on the frontier road are loaded with incredibly patient individuals, armed with a water-pipe, a prayer-carpet, and pitifully little food tied in the corner of a tattered garment. Sometimes a roll of bedding is added to such simple necessities, for the nights are bitterly cold in the ranges heaped along the six hundred and thirty miles which divide Dusdap in the Southern corner of the Dasht-i-Lut desert from Meshed on the borders of Russian Turkestan.

I left the former with a convoy of three lorries, loaded to approximately double their capacity with bales of piece-goods from India. On top of these, between them, over them, after the first jolted subsidences, under them, it would appear, were piled a heterogeneous mass of pilgrims. Men, women and their half-grown children were so closely and inextricably wedged that the lorries might well have represented the removal of remains after some Asiatic slaughter. All sorts of heads, arms and legs hung or waved from the sides and it was impossible to distinguish their owners in the uncomplaining welter of humanity, fortified against any amount of physical misery by a vision of the golden dome of Imam Reza.

I shared the driver's seat on the first lorry. He was an Armenian eunuch who considered his passengers savages and who fortified himself against the fatigues of the journey by taking cocaine at frequent intervals. We left Dusdap at seven in the evening in order to cross a hundred miles of desert before sunrise. Malik Siah Kuh Sir, frontier of three countries—Persia, Afghanistan and Baluchistan—loomed above other less imposing hills. Here a dervish was miraculously saved by death from thirst by the revelation of water at its summit. Consequently, from the shrine built below the dark mountain which bears his name, issued one of the same order, his staff bound with fluttering rags. The superstitious pilgrims paid toll to avoid misfortune,

but, in spite of this, the lamps failed, the connexion broken by continual jolting, and after mending them twice, the driver of the first lorry announced himself exhausted. Without further words, he flung himself face downwards on the desert and, covered by a piece of carpet, went to sleep.

It was then three a.m. and most of the pilgrims were too stiff to move. Like bunches of locusts, they remained entangled on the bales of piece-goods. But one polite little Kermani dropped down beside me and proffered consolation in the form of an opium-pipe. "It is the only way we shall endure the journey," he said, and proceeded to fan some fragments of charcoal into a glow. A pellet was rolled and balanced above the hole in the china bowl. It was cold, and neither bedding nor food could be retrieved from the serrated human and vegetable masses behind me, so after half an hour I accepted the Kermani's offer. The effect was not so stimulating as I had hoped, but a great calm enveloped me and when the dawn came I was able to argue the Armenian into action.

By four-thirty a.m. we were on our way again, and three hours later, a tea-khané appeared as a most welcome relief to the desert, which was as usual neatly tucked between the feet of sudden, far-off ranges. The place was only a mud hovel, surrounded by piles of dirty quilts, from which presently emerged the host, and some muleteers whose beasts had strayed out of sight. The tea was made with the salt water common to the Persian desert, but the pilgrims descended in a horde to drink it until the supply gave out. It is the tea habit which reduces the average progress of lorries to eight or nine miles an hour. As the drivers never go to sleep if they can help it, driving red-eyed and half demented by exhaustion for anything up to seventy-two hours on end, they insist on stopping at every tea-khané to relieve a thirst engendered by opium or cocaine. The host smiles darkly above a row of urns simmering on a clay stove. "Seat yourselves here, for we have everything your honesties require," he says. "Well, can we

have bread and eggs?" "I have neither of those to-day, but everything you need," which in the end means lukewarm tea.

That day was a veritable nightmare, for the overloaded lorries averaged barely seven miles an hour and everything possible was shaken from its place, beginning with a Delco and ending with something essential in a dynamo. All the tyres burst, and by evening, one lorry was crawling at two miles an hour with three covers stuffed with sacking and desert scrub, which went on fire at intervals from the friction. At the next stop, a boy on a donkey, who was making considerably better pace, having stared at the gaping tyre for ten minutes, remarked: "It is broken." The driver, hitherto stupefied by lack of sleep, found his voice and a most unusual sarcasm. "Not at all. A bird has built a nest in it and I am looking for eggs."

Nothing better illustrates the careless optimism of the Persian than the way he starts out on a three-day journey with insufficient oil, water, spares, benzene or food. One car asked us for matches three miles from its starting-point after we had been as many days on the road. To warm up a recalcitrant engine, the driver generally pours petrol over it and sets it alight and I heard of one chauffeur who, half frozen in the passes of Seistan, started a fire with his spare tubes. The village "hammam"* is always called upon to supply hot water for the radiator. It is so dirty that it clogs the pipes and the aroma is reminiscent of a battle-field.

At Shusp, there is a pond sunk under old mulberries with scarlet poinsettias curving over the neighbouring walls. Into this the pilgrims precipitated themselves as one man and a dreadful stench arose, for the water serves all purposes from a place of ablution for beasts, men and corpses, to a sewer and, of course, a drinking-fountain. Wooden couches were spread with carpets and at last there was food in the shape of sour goats' milk, sheets of native bread, about one egg per dozen people, and white mulberries.

* Public bath.

KERMAN

MOTOR CONVOY ON THE WAY TO MESHED

BIRJAND

After that it rained and we laboured across a soft red plain tufted with all sorts of bushes. We stuck in every conceivable place and position, from which the pilgrims pushed, levered and hauled us with the utmost good nature. In the middle of the night we laboured into Birjand, the engines making a cacophony of such unusual sounds that I thought it would be the end of the journey. The pilgrims, temporarily released from durance among the bales, heaped themselves around the lorries in the middle of what appeared to be a sandy square. With the polite Kermani, who for some unknown reason talked Arabic, I set forth in search of lodging. Eventually, we knocked up a most amiable Indian who, in pyjamas and a Russian sheep-skin, led us through blind-walled by-ways to the house of an official wherein for three blessed hours I lay flat on something that was a little less hard than the front seat of a two-ton truck.

In the green of the false dawn we started off again, leaving Birjand, a town of six or eight thousand people all engaged in making carpets, or in dyeing the brilliant yarns which hung flag-like round the square, as a pile of soap-bubble roofs heaped one above the other against the usual background of stark hills. Everybody said we must hurry or we should not reach Meshed the following day, but we wasted a couple of hours at Sehdeh where the pilgrims, famished into revolt, pillaged the place with the thoroughness of locusts. In the dirtiest tea-khané I had yet encountered, I shared a bowl of *mast* with a bearded Indian who used the end of his puggaree as a handkerchief. He told me there was no work in India and much unemployment. Consequently, he had come to Persia where he could earn about £10 a month as a lorry driver. "But there is so much competition we must overload, or we cannot earn anything at all. Three years ago on this road which, as you see, is very bad, I could get seventy tomans (approximately £12) for every kharwar (six hundred and fifty pounds), but now the price has fallen to twenty tomans. What are we to do? We must break our

lorries or starve; but this new motor tax will finish us." With which gloomy foreboding he returned to his wheel, prepared to drive for a further thirty-six hours without other stops than were indicated by a succession of tea-khanés.

On the borders of Seistan, the women wear short, full skirts like kilts, and the men mountaineers leggings of swathed felt or sacking, with raw hide shoes tied up to the knee with thongs.

A Baluchi hanging over the edge of a bale engaged me in conversation. "The Seistanis like the English, as we do. When will there be more war? That was a good time. Every man had plenty of money to spend and bullets to play with. We had never been so rich before and now we are poor again. I have but one shirt and it is patched."

"Not so well as thou thinkest!" retorted another voice and an argument ensued out of sight.

During the third night, the drivers fell asleep at regular intervals. Fortunately we were in the middle of one of those plains or deserts, seventy miles in extent, which, at different levels, separate the ranges. When the Armenian eunuch's head dropped on to the wheel, I kicked him gently till he flung back a mop of wild black hair and repeated parrot-wise: "What are you doing? I am not in the least tired. I am never tired. I drive a post lorry for a hundred hours without stopping"—by which time, having mislaid his cocaine, he was generally asleep again.

At last, after one lorry had strayed off the track into the middle of a piled black mass which resolved itself into a nomad family asleep in the midst of their goats and their bedding which the kids apparently shared, and another had nearly turned over in a rut, spilling pilgrims like berries out of a bowl, we stopped for two hours' rest. The place was ill-chosen, for it was deep in sand, which a cold wind whirled into one of those sudden storms that blot out the landscape as effectively as a London fog.

Impregnated with grit, smarting and half-blinded,

we crawled back on to the lorries and pursued our weary way. Dawn came at four-thirty, and five hours later we reached Turbat-i-Haidari, to whose walled gardens of poplars, planes and fruit-trees, a Norman air is given by a succession of ruined watch-towers. Here the pilgrims were presumably expected, for after an hour, during which everyone relaxed, nerveless, in a yard occupied by an Afghan caravan, a procession came out of the market carrying trays laden with sheets of bread in which were wrapped morsels of goats' flesh and cheese, flanked by bottles of sour milk.

From the Afghan we learned that the ruler of Herat had re-instituted *Sheria* law, against which Amanullah fought in vain.

"In these days, a robber loses his hand or his leg, both if he is unlucky," vouchsafed a magnificent tribesman in voluminous and dirty white, his turban and his moustache equally vast. "Allah forbid! Why should it kill him? My own brother, the son of my mother, had two limbs cut off and, within the same month he was leading his band in the mountains."

The Persians regarded him with a mixture of awe and distaste as, with a natural swagger, he strode down to his camels. "A savage," they said, and remembered, perhaps to their comfort, that Pahlavi hats, symbols of civilization, could be bought for eightpence in every Persian bazaar.

On the fourth evening we reached the particularly arid crags, colourless as mountains of the moon, from which, on a clear day, it is possible to distinguish the domes and minarets of Meshed, the place of martyrdom. Long before this, the pilgrims had worked themselves to a pitch of frenzy with reiterated cries of "Ya Ali! Ya Husayn!" Already women were weeping and men tearing their hair or their flesh. The most temperamental beat themselves with the sharpest instruments they could lay hands on, and as they heeded not the direction of their blows, the lorries were in an uproar.

Fortunately, the road was so rough and the gradients of the sharp, right-angle turns so acute as we climbed

the guardian range of Meshed, that the attention of the pilgrims was somewhat diverted. At each corner whereat the lorries were forced to back, we shed a few passengers, but these rapidly picked themselves up and ran after us with stones to put under the wheels, a necessary precaution in view of the narrow and precipitate track, the protest of overheated brakes and radiators, and the overloading of the trucks till they had the appearance of leaning skyscrapers.

A storm alternatively spat dust or rain at us out of a whirlpool of conflicting winds, but the pilgrims raced into the gloom, intent on saluting Imam Reza under his golden dome. On the top of a ridge, piles of stones, interspersed with votive rags, bore witness to the devotion of their predecessors. Having added to these the largest bits of rock they could find, men and women beat their heads and their breasts, flung themselves on the ground and in the middle of their lamentations, which rose in hoarse, hysterical screams, were almost blown off the edge of the cliff. Shepherded unwillingly into the lorries by their spiritual guides, who had hitherto led the excitement, exhaustion laid hold of them, and it was in a comparative calm, broken only by a muttered: "Zoh, Zoh, Ya Husayn!" that we laboured into Meshed, where the tents of mourning were already raised, the black carpets spread, and the black pennons fluttering in preparation for a week of spiritual sorrow, mitigated by sherbet, water-pipes and sweetmeats, not to speak of a temporary marriage obligingly arranged for the physical delectation of the faithful.

CHAPTER XV

MESHED AND THE RUSSIAN TURKOMAN

MESHED is a Holy City of the Shias because Imam Reza, eighth of the twelve Imams acknowledged by this branch of Islam, is buried here amidst the richest treasure of the Mohamedan world. Legend has it that he was murdered by means of a dish of poisoned grapes by order of the Khalif Mamun, son of the famous Haroun er Rashid who, curiously enough, is buried under the same golden dome.

It was the Safavi dynasty who, early in the sixteenth century, having established Shiism as the national faith, set out to divert the endless procession of pilgrims from Mecca to Meshed by enriching the shrine of the immortal Imam and publishing abroad the tale of its miracles. Imam Reza is supposed by the more ignorant among the faithful to be still alive and his second manifestation is eagerly awaited by the tens of thousands who yearly visit his golden shrine and partake of his three days' free hospitality.

Meshed lives by the pilgrim trade. Its normal population is approximately a hundred thousand and in its great tree-lined boulevards the polyglot crowd consists of Baluchis, Sikhs and Hindoos; Afghans in spacious white; Armenians, Greeks and Jews; Huzaras, who are supposed to be the descendants of Timour's invading hosts; Tartars and Mongols, both with high cheek-bones and slit eyes; Tajiks and Turkomans in huge sheepskin hats and garments not unlike striped nightshirts, belted however, with sufficient weapons to destroy the illusion; Uzbegs in wadded coats lined with skins in spite of the heat; Sayeds with tightly rolled green turbans and Mullahs with loose white ones; dervishes, a mass of rags, scars and wildly matted hair;

Arabs from the Gulf and from Mesopotamia, the Shias with black-and-white-chequered kufiyas and the Sunnis with red ones; a few Wahabis from Hasa, and all sorts of Caucasians escaped from Soviet rule. There are also the "Jadid," a curious people, Jews by inclination, who were forcibly converted to Islam about 1830, but who still keep Saturday as their day of rest and who will not intermarry with Moslems or Christians.

Most of the floating population, which is increased at different seasons by more than a hundred thousand pilgrims, revolves round the square quarter-of-a-mile which no infidel is allowed to enter. This holy ground offers Bast (refuge) to every criminal, civil or political, and even to Jews, Christians and Parsees. In its centre are the blue-tiled courts of Imam Reza and the mosque of Gauhar Shah, wife of Tamerlane's son, Shah Rukh. The sacred quadrilateral is in the middle of the bazaar, across which chains are stretched to mark the limit beyond which only the faithful may penetrate. H.H. the Imam, dead or miraculously alive, owns land, houses, shops and caravanserais. He has a hundred servants for every week of the year, so that the total retinue attached to his shrine numbers approximately five thousand. Within its walls, an average of five to eight thousand pilgrims are always being entertained, and in addition to these, some five or six hundred beggars are daily served with free meals. The revenue of the shrine has been variously estimated at £16,000 to £20,000 per annum and it is administered by a Mutawali Basha, Guardian-in-Chief, appointed by the Shah and equal in importance to the Civil Governor, or the General commanding the district.

When I was in Meshed, Muharram had just begun and all night long the toms-toms beat and excited pilgrims reiterated the lament for the deaths of their first Imams, son-in-law and grandson of the Prophet, "Zoh! Zoh! Ya Ali! Ya Husayn!"

On the tenth day a procession starts from the main court of Imam Reza and marches round the city. The

ALL THAT THE INFIDEL CAN SEE OF
IMAM REZA'S GOLDEN DOME

THE MOSQUE OF IMAM REZA AT MESHED

participants are robed in white. They carry swords, axes, chains and other implements of martyrdom. With these they strike themselves on heads and backs till the blood spatters their garments and they look as if they had come from battle-field or shambles. The government is doing its best to suppress such expression of religious hysteria, but for a week beforehand the pilgrims have been watching the very realistic Tazieh —the holy plays in which the martyrdoms of Ali and Husayn are portrayed to the last detail of headless, blood-stained corpses—and they are worked up to a frenzy of exaltation. The women sob and shriek. The men yell themselves hoarse. Dervishes spin in circles, foaming at the mouth. According to Sayed Abbas Shah Monsoor, whose duty it is to arrange for the stave men who accompany the procession with long sticks to prevent the impact of too violently wielded swords on the close-shaven heads of the fanatics, half a dozen people kill themselves each year and thirty or forty are seriously wounded.

Meshed, of course, makes carpets. It sells turquoises from the mines of Nishapur. It was the home of Firdusi, the epic poet, who wrote the History of Persia in sixty thousand verses, under the title of "The Book of Kings." It weaves silk, cotton and velvet, and since Persian ladies have taken to high heels, a number of its cobblers are employed in making very good modern shoes. It still carries on the trade introduced by Tamerlane, who imported a colony of Damascans to teach the local smiths how to make the fine damascened blades which Tartar and Turkoman use to-day.

But, apart from the miracles and mysteries of Imam Reza, the chief interest of Meshed is its position near the frontiers of Russian Turkestan and Afghanistan. At the present moment, it is the goal of refugees from Central Asia and the far-off Volga, for the Soviet authorities are trying to settle the tribes of their Central Asian Republics in agricultural communities and the nomads strongly object. They refuse to consider the possibilities of collective farming.

When I was in Meshed, two hundred Turkoman from Dushak had recently crossed the frontier with their families and cattle. Fully armed, they had been able to force a passage, but they had suffered considerable casualties at the hands of the frontier guards. From these I learned that twelve hundred of their fellow-tribesmen, refusing to submit to the confiscation of their cattle for the purpose of collective farming, had moved from the Merv-Tejend district and established themselves round some wells in the Karakum desert, where they were prepared to offer armed resistance to any expedition.

In the Goklan district, parties of Turkoman are constantly crossing the frontier with the intention of settling among their fellows outside Soviet territory. It is the wise policy of the Persian Government to give whatever assistance is necessary to these cattle-breeding nomads in order to strengthen their frontier by establishing along it strong sections of anti-Russian Turkoman. In this connexion, it must be remembered that Persia has always regarded England and Russia as her dangerous neighbours and it is natural that her every political move should be dictated by its effect on the two countries whose Eastern ambitions once threatened her sovereignty.

A large number of Russian Turkoman have recently emigrated to Afghanistan where they have been well received, and the Tekke Turkoman have announced their desire to transport themselves, *en masse*, into Persian territory. In view of the numbers concerned, the Pahlavi Government replied that it could only permit the entry of those families which were originally of Persian stock, and that these would be supplied with pastural land in the neighbourhood of Burujird. Nothing daunted, the Tekkes continue to fight their way across the frontier in spite of the strengthening of the Russian posts, which have received orders to shoot all would-be fugitives.

The Yalatoun Jamshidi Turkoman protested against the threatened imposition of collectivism by returning in force to Afghanistan, while in Kerki, the Turkoman chiefs

TURKOMAN AT MESHED

A NOMAD MEAL

informed the Soviet authorities that they were prepared to resist the collectivization of their cattle and if their arms failed, they would migrate in a body to Afghanistan.

Meshed also harbours a number of refugees from European Russia who had first migrated to Tashkent either to escape collective farming, or because they believed that food was more plentiful in Central Asia. From these I learned that the Soviet authorities require the peasants of Tajikistan to devote themselves to the exclusive cultivation of cotton as part of the scheme which should eventually make Russia self-supporting. At present she imports Persian cotton in large quantities, but her new railway connecting the vast grain-growing areas of Siberia with Turkestan should enable her to supply the Central Asian communities with wheat in exchange for the cotton which in Tajikistan can be cultivated under the most favourable conditions. Unfortunately the peasants are afraid of famine, and accustomed to growing their own food supplies within sight of their own door; they will not rely on the railway, whose rapid construction is a feat of which the Soviet Government can justly be proud.

Among the European Russians recently arrived in Meshed were a party of twenty-one, who with four women and several children, had run the gauntlet of the Persian road-guards and the G.P.U. posts on the frontier. Two other groups, one of fifteen and one of fourteen, included three women, two ex-officers, two Red Army deserters, one Greek Orthodox clergyman, a railway linesman, several factory employees, engineers, and motor drivers, three students from Petrograd who had failed to escape by the guarded Northern frontiers, some farmers and peasants. All these had decided to leave Russia on account of the difficulty of obtaining food and the "Lack of opportunity for personal advancement" offered by the Soviet régime.

At the same time, those who had passed through Turkestan informed me that a large number of hospitals and schools had recently been built. Education was now within reach of the majority. Cinemas and the

radio were being popularized with a view to civilizing and modernizing the village population. A large church was open in Tashkent and the daily services were well attended. "The Soviet are much more interested in growing cotton than in suppressing religion in Central Asia," said a youth who had been employed on the new Siberian-Turkestan railway and who had left, as far as I could gather, because "The specialists" (i.e. the technical employees) earned sufficient to pay for two courses at their meals—"soup and something else" —while he had to be content with one.

During the last year, two thousand five hundred and forty-two Persians returned to their own country from Baku, owing to the shortage of food, and the Bahai community are leaving Askabad for Persia owing to their mosque having been forcibly closed, and this in spite of the fact that in Persia they are not allowed to have any public places of worship.

The last category of refugees who have recently found their way to Meshed are Germans from the Volga provinces, whose advent is welcomed by the far-sighted Pahlavi Government. These experienced farmers are immediately settled on land capable of development and the Amir-el-Ashkar Amanulla Mirza Khan, commanding at Meshed, told me: "It is amazing how quickly these people improve the conditions of life in the villages where we send them. Not only are the crops doubled, but the houses are cleaner and the whole population becomes more prosperous."

Generally speaking, as a result of information imported by Turkoman and other Russian refugees, I received the impression that Central Asia, while appreciating the services rendered by the Soviet to health, education and certain industries which are being developed, will not accept any form of collective farming and for this reason perhaps, in some districts, notably Samarkand and Tajikistan, recent orders have cancelled the enforcement of the Kulhoz system.

In spite of this official relaxation, the refugees state that villages are often raided at night by Soviet troops,

the cattle and grain are requisitioned and the villagers made to sign a statement that they have "voluntarily" ceded their possessions.

It must be remembered, however, that all statements made in Meshed are apt to be highly-coloured, owing to the hardships endured while crossing a closely-guarded frontier, and doubtless magnified during a not too comfortable sojourn in the "Nazmia" (police station), wherein the passport-less find unwilling refuge.

From Meshed to Tehran is five hundred and sixty miles and the old post couriers used to do it in five or six days—no mean feat; but the Persian prides himself on his hard riding and there is a legend that in 1804 a dragoman bearing the news of Napoleon's escape from Elba, accomplished the one thousand seven hundred miles between Constantinople and Demavend in seventeen days.

According to Lord Curzon, no man would willingly traverse the road between Meshed and Tehran except to reach the end of it. It is certainly desolate. The traffic flowing in the wake of conquerors and kings, of fugitives from justice, or of deposed rulers flying from torture and death, of pilgrims and of preachers, consists chiefly of lorries laden with cotton for Russia or sugar stamped with the labels of a Ukrainian refinery, but probably originating in France. Turkoman still drive their covered wagons drawn by four horses abreast under a huge arched yoke, and a caravan of donkeys may be laden with corpses for Holy Meshed, which is surrounded by cemeteries where Mullahs sit under striped awnings praying for the recently departed. Sometimes, in order to pay the expenses of his journey, a pilgrim will carry the corpse of a wealthy friend across the front of his saddle. At night he parks the corpse with his water-pipe and satchel, while he sleeps on a prayer-carpet beside it.

I left Meshed on a comparatively empty lorry, returning from Askabad, but unfortunately the driver was of a gregarious disposition, so he joined up with a pilgrim convoy, whereon the passengers, condensed into

a solid mass, had paid eighty rupees per head for the return journey between Baghdad and Meshed.

Consequently, whenever we met a similarly laden vehicle coming in the opposite direction, we stopped while prolonged greetings were exchanged. The Iraqis, in long brown abbas with red or blue checked head-dresses according to their tariq, kissed each other on both cheeks with the salutation: "Oh, Pilgrim!" after which they sat down to smoke a pipe and exchange news.

Nishapur, supposed to possess twelve mines—of salt, copper, turquoise, lead, antimony, iron, marble and soap-stones—and credited by the ancients with twelve rivers and twelve thousand villages, springs and kanats, was the birthplace of Dionysius, blessed by Ormuzd as one of the seven paradises of Iran.

Legend ascribes the first city to Tahmuras, fourth in descent from Noah, a Pishdanian king. As usual, Alexander the Great destroyed it and Shapur the Great rebuilt it. An Arab wit said of the mediæval town: "What a fine place it would be if all its water-courses were above ground and all its people underneath," and Abu Ali el Alawi described it as "larger than Fostat (old Cairo), more populous than Baghdad, more perfect than Basra and more magnificent than Kairouan." But it suffered from earthquakes in the twelfth, thirteenth and fifteenth centuries and from worse cataclysms in human shape, for lying on the conquerors' road from Central Asia, it was ravaged by Turkomans in 1153, by Genghis Khan at the head of his Mongol hosts in 1220, when no fewer than one million seven hundred and forty thousand were reputedly slaughtered, and subsequently by Tartar and Afghan invasions as well as by Turkoman raiders, who regarded it as natural loot.

To-day the population cannot be more than ten thousand, a sixth of whom are employed in the industry which provides nine-tenths of the world's supply of turquoises. These are found in the porphyry, green-stone, limestone and sandstone of the neighbouring hills at a height of approximately five thousand feet, and

while the best pieces find their way to the Indian and European markets, the common ones adorn the bridles and saddles of the superstitious and are tied to the fringes of babies as a protection against the evil eye. By burying the less valuable stones in moist earth it is possible to preserve their blue until they can be sold to the unwary, after which they fade to a sickly green.

We arrived at Sebzewar shortly before sunset and the garage, where the lorries occupied the ground floor and the passengers were packed into a series of cubicles opening on to the roof, soon became a hive, wherein black-robed women scuttled about with water-jars and cooking-pots. It was amusing to watch their efforts to remain completely veiled while occupied with such domesticity.

The driver of my lorry approached me with some diffidence and said that he wished to start "rather early."

"All right, three a.m.," I replied, feeling it was a generous concession.

His face fell. "The pilgrims are leaving *a little early*," he repeated, and so they did, for they rattled out of the yard shortly after midnight.

Sebzewar is the centre of the cotton cultivation. It markets a considerable quantity of local wool and owing to the proximity of a copper mine, the bazaars are full of pots and other vessels. It seemed to me that it should also be famous for the penetrating voices of its *muezzins*, for the sunset and the night calls to prayer were the loudest and the most disturbing I had ever heard.

Between Sebzewar and Shahrud are the four "Stages of Terror" which used to be the happy hunting-ground of Turkoman raiders. One can see the remains of the circular "towers of refuge," wherein at the first alarm, all travellers barricaded themselves against attack. This particular stretch, bordering the northern edge of the great Kavir, on which a stiff froth of salt glistens like snow, provided a regular supply of slaves for the markets of Khiva and Bokhara till Russia put an end to the traffic by Skobeleff's victorious campaign against the Tekke Turkoman in 1881.

On the second day we lunched at Miana, where the cook-shops cluster under a vast mulberry tree, round whose trunk a platform has been built. On this the Iraqi pilgrims prayed, their foreheads pressed against the squares of holy earth they had bought in Meshed, but first they inquired the direction of Mecca from amused and indifferent Persians.

For sixpence I acquired a large meal of pilau, chicken so well cooked that it came to pieces in the hand, and mince wrapped in vine leaves, all on the same plate. The tea was made with salt water from the Kavir and the *mast* was uneatable for the same reason, but a muscular pilgrim climbed into a tree and shook down a quantity of fat white mulberries for us.

Of Shahrud I remember nothing but a great desire to sleep and no opportunity to gratify it. Once again there was a garage in the middle of a fortified caravanserai, and I paid eightpence for a wooden couch from which I was roused by an indignant driver after two hours of semi-consciousness.

In the gorgeous days of Shah Abbas the largest of such khans was said to include seventeen hundred rooms, with baths, shops and a tea-garden, and there are still some splendid mud buildings with crenellated walls and flanking watch-towers in the vicinity of Yezd, which contain two or three hundred stalls and rooms, and which used to afford nightly shelter to the whole population of the district.

At Shahrud breakfast, which cost threepence and consisted of bread, eggs and onions, was enlivened by a vocal duet between the watch-dogs who make the night intolerable and a posse of jackals determined on self-expression.

On the third day, the road improved and we rattled along at sixteen miles an hour with a medley of little hills ruched at the edge of the plain. On the other side, the rising mountains were like silk delicately crumpled on a counter.

Semnan was full of soldiers in hooped wagons, drawn by four horses abreast. Men were working on

the road, three to each spade. One held the handle, another pushed or pulled at his waist, and a third added his mite by dragging at a string attached to the implement. It is said that the voices of Semnan are as harsh as "the rattling of stones in a gourd."

The village is only eight miles from Kishlak, entry to that mountain range which contained the pass known as the Caspian Gates. Through it came the Great King Darius, fugitive before the pursuing hosts of Alexander. This must have been the high road of the Parthian kings, whose capital was Hekatompylos (the city of a hundred gates) where, in 1404, two towers of human heads were seen by a Castilian Embassy on its way to the Tartar Court. Along it, in 1763, passed the terrible Zeki Khan who planted a garden of prisoners, their heads thrust downwards into the earth; and later, by the same Caspian Gates, came the hundred Georgian families whom Shah Abbas forcibly settled at Abbasabad to form a link in the military colonies he designed for the defence of his northern frontier.

Now, the pass is the signal for lorry drivers to replenish their radiators, for the road climbs up and down between the ranges, with Mount Demavend watching in the distance.

It happened that with us there was one passenger so fat that nothing could move him. His complacency was wrapped in folds of adipose tissue. His limbs were a succession of billows. But the rest of the travellers panted after the lorry with stones ready to stick under the wheels whenever it hesitated, and thus we came to the top of the world.

A fourth night was spent in a very clean but, alas, very religious village, where relays of students read the Koran in stentorian tones during the short hours the driver allotted to sleep.

Red-eyed he climbed back into his seat. Speechless from exhaustion he dropped his head on the wheel and mechanically sounded the horn till the last of his miserable passengers had crawled into place. By seven a.m. we were in Tehran.

CHAPTER XVI

ENGLAND AND RUSSIA IN MODERN PERSIA

BACK in Tehran, after a journey which had taken me to the ends of Persia, I found myself regarding the capital from an entirely different point of view. When first I came to it, very nearly direct from the oil-fields, I saw it as an impetuous attempt to impose a Western surface on a conception of life which was still fundamentally Eastern. But on my return from provinces, where life has remained static for more than a thousand years and where modernity in the shape of new roads, new methods of transport, a new security and the uncomfortable clothing connected with it, are but irritants to an epidermis corrugated with age and hardened by instinctive resistance, I realized the significance of Tehran.

The social development of Persia stopped somewhere about A.D. 930 and for a thousand years the mass mind lay fallow. Poets, philosophers and metaphysicians appealed to the sentimentality and the ingenious argumentative powers of a limited class which has always enjoyed the pastime of hair-splitting and which delights in questions to which there is no decisive answer, but for all practical purposes, a thousand years of savagery and brutality unequalled in the history of any other empire have passed over Persia without rousing any permanent reactions. Babism in its day was welcomed as a means of escape not only from the materialism of Islam, but from a despotism based on ignorance and fear, but Abdul Baha left no definite revelation and the message for which his followers waited was not forthcoming at his death. Consequently, Babism in Persia is not increasing and though their numbers are always exaggerated, I doubt if there are more than twenty thousand of this enlightened sect throughout the country.

A CARPET BEGINNING

A CARPET NEARLY FINISHED

THE GULESTAN PALACE AT TEHRAN

Round the edges of the great deserts A.D. 930 and 1930 exist side by side. In the same village I found a modern dispensary and a wiseacre who offered among other strange remedies, a flask of donkey's tears collected by a virgin at full moon.

The polyglot young student, in tweeds and horn-rimmed spectacles, goes back to a walled domain where the wife whom he has not seen before marriage, except in a mirror, meets him on the threshold of the anderun with the news that his brother has arrived with his family and servants, unannounced and for an undefined stay which may be protracted for months, during which the host cannot enter the women's portion of the house for fear he catch sight of his sister-in-law.

Twelve years ago it was difficult for a boy to secure any but a religious education. Now, the majority of town-bred girls go to school, but at the age of nine they put on the chadour and the ruband, or, in the more modern cities, the vizier, which has taken its place. True, the chadour is apt to stop at the knee and the vizier be tilted at a becoming angle, but I talked to many young women in anderuns furnished by Europe who said: "We should *hate* to give up the chadour. We should *hate* to meet men;" and added erroneously: "The chadour is part of our religion, so of course we like it." For while the young men are bridge-players and motorists and agnostics, the majority of the girls they marry are still devoutly Moslem and content with the circumscribed limits of the anderun. A charming young woman of seventeen, who had been married for a couple of years to an elderly and most unprepossessing official with whom she was quite happy, told me that mothers consider it unlucky to refuse the first suitable offer for a daughter, however old the suitor.

On the other hand in Tehran, I met several Persian ladies who wore their French clothes as easily as they talked the language of Paris, so it would seem that in the varying position and outlook of women there are gaps similar to those between the villager blissfully content with his turban, but with a Pahlavi hat stuck in

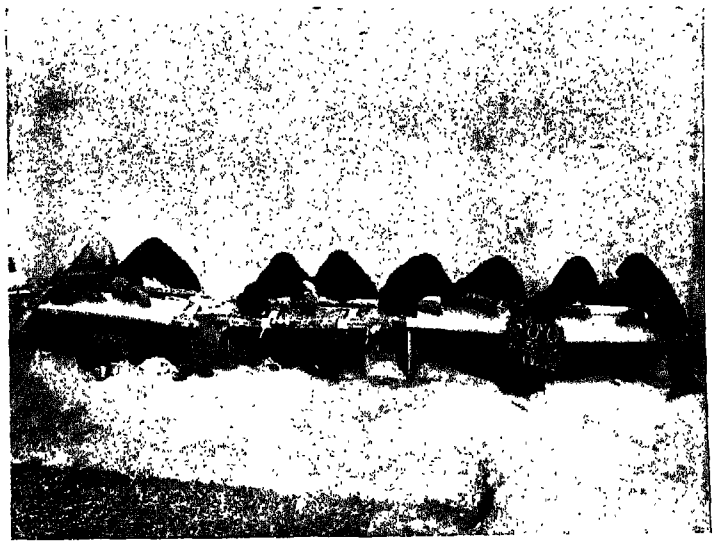
his mightily swathed sash in case of emergency, and the efficient young man in an office who reads Galsworthy and Dostoievsky.

Here is the crux. There is too great a division between the educated and the illiterate. In Persia there has been no gradual mental and social development. Tehran has leaped a thousand years, and there is this entire period of time between the college graduates intent on chemistry and commerce and those members of their families who have remained enclosed within the blind mud walls of some patriarchal village. The conflict between the two points of view is often excessively bitter, for there has been no gradual evolution between A.D. 930 and 1930. I have stayed in houses where the father wears the rolled turban of the Mullah and reads the Koran with his fingers stuffed into his ears, while the son, a graduate in science, plays jazz on a gramophone. To this his mother, with henna-stained fingers, has probably attached a string of turquoise beads to divert the evil of what is undoubtedly magic!

Tehran therefore is not only a gesture and an experiment. Its importunate modernism is the refuge and the rallying point of reformers who are still fighting with their backs against the wall, and on my second visit I was able to appreciate the extent of the conflict.

During the last five or six years, Persia has made remarkable, in most cases almost incredible, progress towards the Westernization which has always been Reza Shah's goal. The country has been opened up by means of a number of important roads. The introduction of European dress has established a standard of neatness hitherto unknown, and by abolishing the differences which used to exist between the costumes of the various districts, has enabled a man to think of himself as a Persian, rather than as a Shirazi, an Isfahani or a Kermani. Tehran is being embellished with new public buildings, wide avenues and well arranged municipal gardens. The provincial capitals, centres of the network of lorry traffic which has altered the whole appearance of the country, are being rapidly modernized

VILLAGE DANCERS



A CAMERA PRODUCES THIS RESULT AMONG TOWNSWOMEN
BUSY WITH EMBROIDERY

by the introduction of broad, well-lighted streets, garages and the embryo of an hotel system. Camel and mule caravans are relegated to the desert or to the still inaccessible mountain regions, and American cars have taken their place on the new highways.

Young Persia is being educated on Western lines as fast as the Department of Public Works can build schools and as the English and American Universities in Isfahan and Tehran can turn out teachers to run them. In this direction progress is still hampered by a lack of technical instructors, but each year the government sends a hundred students to Europe to receive a specialized education, and it has engaged several French professors for Persian schools. Health is gradually improving, but there is still a dearth of fully qualified doctors, and unsanitary conditions in the villages contribute to the high death rate.

Had it not been for the troubles in Afghanistan, Persian women would by this time have been unveiled. As it is, the chadour is not obligatory in the more enlightened towns and the wives of ministers and public officials are beginning to discard it. Except among the tribes, the majority of the girls are sent to school and it is these comparatively educated young women who will lead the next generation's revolt against the veil.

But the greatest achievement of the present government is in the realms of public security. Ten years ago each province was the natural prey of the tribes whose powerful chiefs made and unmade dynasties, according to their own convenience. Khuzistan enriched the Bakhtiari raiders and Shiraz the Kashgais. Azerbaijan was at the mercy of Kurds and of the Shahsevand tribe, Khorasan of the Turkoman and Kerman of the Baluchis. If anyone had then been asked if it were possible to break the power of the independent Khans, he would have answered with a decided negative, yet the Pahlavi Government has accomplished this apparently Herculean task with an army of thirty-five thousand, recently increased to approximately sixty thousand. It has disarmed all but certain sections of the Kurdish

and Kashgai mountaineers, and with the exception of sporadic disturbances on the new road through Luristan, it has put an end to the toll regularly levied for more than three hundred years on the lives and goods of travellers.

For the first time in recent history the Persian army is without foreign instructors or officers. It is well armed, clothed and mounted and the scale of pay is sufficient, though graft still interferes with its distribution. Created for the definite purpose of maintaining a centralized national government independent of tribal support, it has proved adequate to the task demanded of it. Its loyalty is unquestioned, and backed by a fairly efficient force of road-police—the Amnia—it has proved the most important instrument for modernist and nationalist propaganda. For the presence throughout the country of powerful military elements has fostered, in addition to a sense of personal security, one scarcely less important of individual pride. For centuries Persia has been intimidated by her more powerful neighbours and the quality of human material on which the Pahlavi Government must inevitably base its rapid and drastic reforms has degenerated through the feeling of inferiority induced by foreign influence.

The Persian character is a curious blend of optimism and intense suspicion. Informed that he must accept the European interpretation of progress, the Iranian remembers the continual exploitation of his country at the hands of the West and the better his education the more chauvinistic he becomes.

At the present moment the consciousness of so much new military and political activity is breeding in him an unnatural arrogance which spoils his naturally charming manners, but it has its good side, for it makes the gentle and hitherto none too courageous Iranian realize that he is an individual with nothing but his own self-consciousness to prevent his being the equal of a European.

The Persian is naturally among the most intelligent of Eastern races. The hospitality of Iran is famous and the Iranian is philosophical, subtle, adaptable and quick-witted, but if conversation is his sport, prevari-

OUTSIDE A PERSIAN DOCTOR'S CONSULTING ROOM

OPIUM SMOKERS

cation is the art in which he takes most interest. He is fundamentally lazy and procrastination is his most cherished habit, but on special occasions he is capable of sustained hard labour that would stagger the European. Brilliantly intuitive, but sensitive as a child, his exaggerated vanity, whether personal or national, will not bear criticism. At this moment when it is essential that Persia should benefit by the experience of Europe, in order to achieve the splendid goal she has set herself as the bulwark of a stable and progressive civilization against the inroads of the disruptive elements in Russia and Afghanistan, her government is characteristically unable either to trust or to follow the advice of the expensive foreign specialists it employs.

No Persian has confidence in his fellows. Consequently, there is no possibility of satisfactory local administration, for everything must be referred to Tehran, and the system of internal espionage which is the worst legacy of the past finds expression in the "gawaz,"* without which permit no traveller can leave or enter a town. Business is delayed and endless possibilities for graft afforded by this attempt to control the movements, officially in the interests of conscription, of all citizens. It serves no purpose, for it only interferes with legitimate travellers who are obliged to waste hours explaining their business to illiterate officials, while those whose motives will not bear investigation have no difficulty in evading publicity by leaving the town otherwise than by the main gates and hailing any form of transport they choose out of sight of the Amnia. Fortunately, the majority of Persians are infinitely patient and equally law-abiding. Probably there is a smaller proportion of the population in prison than in any Western country, and if in spite of the energetic efforts of the present government, graft is still rife, it has assumed the dignity of a code. In Europe we pay our judges and public officials very high salaries and expect from them a corresponding standard of honesty. In the East such functionaries are rarely paid

* I have been informed that the gawaz has now been abolished.

a living wage and it is a generally accepted fact that they will eke out their salaries by a reasonable scale of bribery. If they go beyond what is considered just in view of the position they are obliged to maintain, protest and retribution follow. The Pahlavi Government has instituted a commission of inquiry which has doubtless had a salutary effect in reducing corruption but, even if it were possible to ensure the scrupulous honesty of all its members, its files would either be stolen or burned, as was recently the case at Meshed, if its inquiries are pushed too far.

Now that the pacification of the country is complete and its continuation ensured by an Army which is to be increased, by means of conscription for a period of two years, to a total strength of a hundred thousand, the chief concern of Persia is her relations with England and Russia.

In considering these, it is as well to remember that her population is far from homogeneous. The South-west speaks only Arabic and the North-west Turkish, which appears again among the Turkoman of Khorasan. Arabs, Baluchis, Kurds, Armenians, Jews, Zoroastrians and Nestorians all have different religions, and all represent different racial problems. Moreover, Persia has lived in fear of foreign dominion. The unratified treaty of 1919 evolved by the late Lord Curzon and Sir Percy Cox would have enforced what was virtually a British Protectorate and from this Persia considers that she was saved solely by the Russian advance in the Caucasus. It is natural, therefore, that she should be chary of making any concessions which would impinge on her hardly-acquired independence.

Determined not only to be mistress in her own house, but to extend her authority over the road which leads to it, she wishes to undertake the responsibility for lighting and policing the Persian Gulf in which nine-tenths of the shipping is British. By the Turko-Persian frontier commission 1913–14, the latter is only entitled to a small anchorage outside Muhammerah and while Persia owns a river frontage of approximately fifty

miles on the Shatt el Arab, the whole of that waterway is left in the hands of Iraq.

At present the port of Basra is responsible for the upkeep of the Shatt el Arab and for the maintenance of the lighthouses on both sides of the Gulf, which Great Britain patrols by means of four sloops. By the Slavery Convention of 1883 she has the right to search Persian as well as Arab dhows suspected of carrying human contraband, and by the way she carries out a difficult task she renders inestimable service to Persia. For it is well known that, under the ægis of Barket Khan, a Baluchi chieftain whose stronghold is in the inaccessible mountains near the south-eastern frontier, an average of two hundred slaves annually are still shipped in Persian dhows from the coast of Mekran.

It is stated by members of the government that Persia loses a yearly revenue of some L.St.200,000 by the smuggling of tea and sugar in the Gulf. In order to prevent this illicit trade she has ordered from Italy two small cruisers and four gunboats and has sent between twenty and thirty young Persians to be trained as naval officers at Leghorn; but as there are neither suitable docks nor harbours along her coast-line and the ships will have to be sent to India for repairs, their upkeep will more than counterbalance any decrease in smuggling.

Persia has entered a claim before the League of Nations to the Island of Bahrein from which she was evicted by the Arabs in 1789, and which the British have administered in co-operation with the local Sheikh since 1810, when they used it as a base for the anti-piracy campaign which freed the Gulf for commercial shipping. She is also concerned with the Dusdap railway which runs for sixty miles into Persian territory, but is operated from Quetta by a British Administrative and an Indian Staff.

With regard to the air-mail route to India, which at present traverses the Persian coast of the Gulf, the Pahlavi Government is of opinion that should the existing contract, which expires in less than two years, be renewed, it might prove an excuse for the institution

of vested British rights within the zone over which Persia is anxious to maintain exclusive control. It views with anxiety the possibility of another form of Gulf Police centred on a succession of aerodromes with foreign staffs, and in case of war it feels that troops might be landed to defend the air-way to the East. It is natural that the Persian Government should prefer an air route across the plateau, which would connect her main towns and taking this into consideration, it would be wise of Imperial Airways to consider the possibilities of such a route for which purpose they were granted the existing temporary contract, which is unlikely to be renewed. Their only alternative would appear to be the construction of aerodromes on the Arab side of the Gulf.

All such questions, involving as they do the relations between neighbours sharing a long commercial frontier, are capable of amicable settlement since the interests of Great Britain and Persia are fundamentally the same. The latter's difficulties with Russia come into a different category.

By the Trade Agreement of 1928, which ended the Soviet embargo established two years earlier, more than half the goods exported by Persia across her Northern frontier were paid for in kind—tea, sugar, ironware, glass crockery and piece-goods—and it was left to Russia to decide what form her own exports should take. In this way she was able to force on her neighbour much that she did not require, besides which, by imposing a fictitious value on the rouble which is approximately nine and a half to the pound sterling in Russia and thirty-five in the bazaars of Tehran, she received higher rates in exchange than those to which she was entitled.

This agreement has now lapsed and a large section of Persian public opinion is in favour of a law to prevent the passing of any but reciprocal treaties, while the extremists demand an embargo on Russian imports. The latter policy would seriously impoverish the North, which, owing to cost of transport and the distance from Iraq or the coast, cannot afford to seek other markets.

Before the War, Russia dominated the Persian

PERSIAN CRAFTS

METAL-WORKERS

POTTERY MAKING

market and she is gradually reassuming her ascendancy. Cotton goods, tea and sugar represent fifty per cent. of the total Persian imports. Last year British imports showed a decrease of thirty-three per cent. and Russian an increase of seventy per cent., while the import of German tools and machinery doubled.

One instance will serve as typical of what is happening all over Persia. Two years ago a British agency in Tabriz used to import three hundred cases of Coats' thread. Now their average has decreased to an annual thirty cases because the Russians are underselling by thirty-three per cent. Russian beer sells in Azerbaijan for 1s. 4d. a bottle and German beer for 2s. 6d., but in a case of the former it is usual to find about forty per cent. bad.

On the other hand, the growing activities of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company have reduced the price of Russian petrol, which three and a half years ago in Azerbaijan was 12s. per four-gallon tin, to 6s. 4d. for the same amount.

The Soviet Government are prepared to sell their goods at prices which forbid the possibility of competition and by trading direct between the state and the consumer they are putting out of business a whole class of Persian shopkeepers and middlemen. Discontent is rife among the Northern merchants. There have been many bankruptcies and suicides, but Persia is at the mercy of her great neighbour, for her richest provinces are at the gates of the Caspian. The natural market for the rice, cotton and dried fruits, the caviar, hides, nuts and carpets grown or made in Gilan and Mazandaran is to be found in Russia.

The recent Bill making the purchase of foreign sterling the monopoly of the newly-created National Bank, which had not sufficient capital to cope with the demand, was possibly aimed at the British Administered Imperial Bank of Persia as much as at Russia's policy of dumping goods in Persia against payment in krans with which she was able to purchase foreign credits. If this was so, both purposes have been fulfilled. The

Imperial Bank has sold to the government its right of printing currency notes and it has come to an agreement with the National Bank, whose directors are Germans, with contracts which will probably not be renewed at the end of three years.

As the natural value of the kran after the recent fall in silver is approximately a hundred and five (silver point) to the pound sterling and it is artificially maintained at fifty-nine-and-a-half, it is impossible for Russia to obtain satisfactory payment for her exports and she is not, at the moment, underselling to her usual extent through private channels, the goods which she barters for Persian imports, and which are very often smuggled back again across her own frontier to be sold for a higher price in the Caucasus and Turkestan.

But what amounted to a ban on foreign sterling has hit the merchants far harder than was contemplated, for Persia is not self-supporting so far as manufactured goods are concerned. Trade at present is at a standstill, for the list of luxuries whose import is forbidden except by special permission of a committee sitting in Tehran under the presidency of the German Director of the National Bank, includes such varied items as animals, alcohol, silk, cotton, lace, furniture, crockery, carriages, motors, mirrors, games, toys, wood and playing cards. Raw materials, such as the yarn on which the whole carpet industry depends, can only be procured after negotiating for a percentage of the money now set aside each month by agreement between the two Banks for the import of necessities. Of this amount fifteen per cent. is in future to be allowed for the import of luxuries.

By March, 1931, it will be illegal for government officials and employees to wear any but Persian cloth, but at present industry cannot possibly be developed sufficiently to supply the needs of a population numbering between ten and fifteen millions.

It is hoped to build factories and cotton mills. Ginning plants have already been set up, but the projected schemes for manufacturing paper and metal

rails have had to be abandoned. The state-owned coal mine near Tehran provides sufficient fuel for the capital, but this industry will have to be entirely reorganized and vastly developed if it is to supply the needs of the new railway. Any other industries that might be instituted in Persia are likely to be hampered at the start by the Russian cut-throat trading.

By introducing a gold standard, Persia hopes to be able to cope with the fall in the value of the kran, but she is adopting the most expensive method of changing her currency. Before the recent fall in silver, it was estimated that it would cost her four and a half million sterling to establish a gold standard. For this purpose she is using the Persian Oil royalty which at present amounts to about a million sterling and which has been allowed to accumulate in London, thus creating a gold reserve. But as its omission from the national assets seriously affects the budget, this artificial situation has been responsible to some extent for the depreciation of the currency. Krans are to be bought in by the government at their present artificial rating up to March 21st, 1932, and after that date at the bullion value. In their place a token coin is to be issued.

It is largely on the projected railway, which may eventually join the new port of Pahlavi on the Caspian with Bandar Shapur on the Gulf, that Persia relies to free herself from dependence on the Russian market. But it is questionable whether it would not be better to spend a tithe of the money on the construction and maintenance of really good roads so that proper transport companies could be organized, freight rates fixed and an end put to the competition of privately-owned lorries competing at wholly inadequate charges all over the country.

Aviation is already doing well, and before the new railway is finished it may well find a serious competitor in the air service, for which Junkers have a monopoly granted in 1927. Since then they have flown six hundred and twenty-five thousand miles and carried ten thousand passengers. It is interesting to note that, whereas in

1927 only ten per cent. of the passengers were Persian, last year the number had increased to seventy-five per cent.

The railway, however, is, after the army, the dearest project of the Shah. Doubtless it will serve a valuable strategic purpose, for by its means troops can be distributed through the areas where they are most needed, but the estimated cost of the completed line is £40,000,000, a terrible drain on a yearly budget of nine million sterling.

It is essential for Persia to have reliable communications with the South, yet the government has set its face against all foreign loans, for fear they should be but the first step to financial control. It is proposed, therefore, to build the railway entirely out of revenue. For this purpose the annual million received from the government monopolies on tea and sugar has been set aside, but if the line is to be completed in eight years, as is hoped, much more will have to be found and it is obvious all over the country that the limit of taxation has been reached.

It would appear that a line from Tehran to Tabriz and thence in connexion with Turkey to the Mediterranean coast would, at a fraction of the cost entailed by the trans-Persian railway (which entails the construction of two complete ports), offer a suitable outlet towards the West for the products of those provinces now in the commercial thrall of Russia.

Persia is certainly to be congratulated on the road which, when completed, will connect Azerbaijan via Kurdistan with the Iraq railway line between Kerkuk and Mosul, but in its efforts to evade the spectres of a Soviet trade monopoly and a foreign loan, it is to be hoped that a government which has done so much in so short a time and in the face of so great difficulties to raise the standard of living and widen the outlook of its people, will not find itself in the position of Sisyphus, for ever rolling the burden of increasing taxation towards the peak of an unnecessary political isolation.

CHAPTER XVII

WITH H.M. THE SHAH

IF any man in the world has the right to use the words of Le Roi Soleil, "*L'État, c'est moi*," it is the Shah. For the Government of Persia is a benevolent autocracy, and as such it is admirably suited to the needs of a country which is forcing within the space of one generation a development that would normally occupy more than a century.

Persia needed a strong man to save her from the slough of post-war despair. She found in Reza Shah not only a wise dictator, but one capable of choosing the right subordinates and of playing them off one against the other, so that no one reaches that pitch of personal ascendancy at which he might become dangerous to a State still in the painful process of growth.

The work of Mussolini has become an established fact. The Italy he has created is independent of his genius, and the new homogeneous Turkey has succeeded in stabilizing within itself the elements which should logically guarantee its existence, even when deprived of the Ghazi's inspiration. But modern Persia depends to-day, and will depend for years, on the life of the Shah. His eldest son is fourteen. There is no one of the same calibre to succeed him. If anything happens to Reza Shah, Persia is bound to become a Republic, and there is no outstanding personality who could be President. Consequently, the jealousy which handicaps Persian officialdom to such an extent that civil and military authorities are invariably at each other's throats and no one is content to acknowledge the authority of another, would give Russia the chance for which she is waiting.

It is the Shah who stands between Persia and the fate of Afghanistan and until with the passage of time his work has ceased to be experimental the peace of Central Asia depends to a great extent upon his life.

Reza Shah is a man of nearly sixty. He has had a hard life, and he over-works to an extent which must jeopardize his health. Everything comes to the palace, and his Majesty's desk is heaped with the plaints of merchants who cannot buy yarn, or who want encouragement for new manufactures; with agricultural returns; with reports of refugees; with conscription figures, and wires from what is rapidly becoming the Azerbaijan front, since Russia has arbitrarily assumed the right to pursue fugitives into her neighbour's territory; with samples of cereals and industrial products; with returns from every public department, and with a host of problematical facts concerning pilgrims and earthquakes, railways, roads, and customs! Yet the Shah remains unmoved.

He is a tall man, of heavy but imposing carriage. He gives an impression of prodigious calm. His speech is slow. He appears to weigh his words, and sometimes to find difficulty in expressing his opinions, which are always definite and unyielding. He is a man of strong personal feelings, capable of unrelenting enmity, as is evinced in his treatment of the old Sheikh of Mohammerah, who is dying of a painful disease in the semi-imprisonment of the house allotted to him outside Tehran, in spite of the pleas of humanitarian governments that he should be allowed to end his life under proper medical treatment in Germany. But if he is implacably oriental in his treatment of a vanquished enemy, he is wholly Western in his conception of the future of Persia.

That he is fundamentally and beyond all else a patriot no one who has talked to him can doubt. He is chauvinistic only because he fears the influence of Europe on the plastic material out of which he means to reshape the great and glorious Persia of earlier dynasties.

Almost the first thing he said to me at a private

audience in the Summer Palace of Sa'd Abad was: "Persia must learn to do without foreigners. I hope that in five or six years it will be unnecessary to employ any but Persian officials. By then we should be able to dispense with all the Europeans in our Public Departments." If these words foreshadow the end of the contracts granted to Belgians in the Customs, to Germans in the National Bank, and to the Imperial Bank of Persia, which is administered by the British, they are particularly significant.

"Of course, we shall employ foreign specialists in industry, agriculture and public works, in fact wherever they are necessary, but Persia must learn to run her own affairs. Remember, she has inherited considerable experience for she once ruled an Empire."

I asked the Shah whether he thought there was any danger of Bolshevism in Persia, and he replied: "None at all. To begin with, sufficient Persians travel to Baku and Erivan to be able to compare the poverty and misery of Russia with the conditions existing in their own country. They are too wise to wish to exchange, and the Persian is not naturally destructive or even experimental. He is not at all in sympathy with Communism. He likes his own possessions, his own life hidden behind the walls of his garden, and his own way of thinking."

"Some years ago we should have said all that about China," I remarked.

His Majesty protested. "The cases are not similar. China was afraid of slipping under foreign dominion and Bolshevism was her only available weapon, but there is no such danger in Persia." The Shah's words came quicker, and he spoke with eager sincerity. "The two great evils from which a country can suffer are foreign control and Communism, and if Persia had to choose between the two I should be the first to put myself at the head of a Communist army."

We spoke next of agriculture, in the development of which the Shah is keenly interested. "There is already a College of Agriculture, in which we are experimenting

with scientific methods, and I hope within a few years there will be travelling experts who will go wherever they are needed, and perhaps instructors in the principal villages. As for industry, I am anxious to develop it in every possible way. I will not bore you with a list of all the innovations I have in mind, but they include mills and plants to deal with every stage of cotton, from the moment it leaves the fields of Azerbaijan till it is made into the shirts we are all going to wear."

His Majesty then informed me that the admirable khaki worn by himself and by the Court Minister, H.H. Teymourtache, who kindly acted as interpreter, was made at Isfahan. "And if you come back next year," concluded the Shah, with one of his rare smiles; "you may quite well find me at the head of the largest factory in the country, for I am determined to increase our production until it is sufficient to supply the needs of the whole nation."

Sitting on a hard chair, in front of a desk most exquisitely inlaid with ivory, mother-of-pearl, and coloured woods, in a room panelled with the same delicate work, which takes a lifetime to execute and is a speciality of the country, his Majesty was a still and powerful figure. His hands rarely moved. He held himself upright. His broad shoulders and the set of his body gave an impression of an immense reserve of force. Here was a man ruled by one concentrated purpose, which he could impose by sheer strength of will on a nation composed of innumerable different races and religions. I began to understand the effect he has on his subjects, who fear or respect him according to the quality of their own characters. I have known extremely modern, efficient, and energetic young Persians earning large salaries in growing industrial concerns reduced to shivering incoherence in the presence of their ruler, whom they looked upon as the Alpha and Omega of contemporary history.

"The Persian character has got to be hardened," said the Shah. "For too long my countrymen have relied on others. I want to teach them their own

value, so that they may be independent in mind and action."

"Do you think it is a good thing to educate your best men in Europe?" I asked, remembering a number of youths, all of whom hankered after the foreign capitals in which they had been educated and according to whose exigeant standards their ideas had been formed.

"It would be much better to educate them here in the country where they are going to live, and with whose progress they must inevitably be concerned," said the Shah. "But we have not yet the necessary machinery. We need all sorts of technical experts, and these must, for the moment, be trained in Europe, but I hope the young men we send to France and Italy will realize that civilization is different for every country. I don't want to turn the Persian into a bad copy of a European. That is not necessary, for he has mighty traditions behind him. I want to make out of my countrymen the best possible Persians. They need not be particularly Western or particularly Eastern. Each country has a mould of its own, which should be developed and improved till it turns out a citizen who is not a replica of anyone else, but an individual sure of himself and proud of his nationality."

At this point I congratulated the Shah on the achievements of the last five years. He sighed. "I am always dissatisfied," he said. "There is so much to be done and I cannot do it quick enough." His glance swept the files on his desk and his Highness Teymourtache interposed: "His Majesty's impatience is a good sign. If once he were satisfied, there would be no more progress."

If Persia owes an immeasurable amount to the Shah, she is also greatly indebted to the Minister of Court, who has ably backed his Sovereign through a succession of difficult phases. Like his Majesty, he is an indefatigable worker, with a quick and clever brain, but he was probably at his strongest when, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, he led an able triumvirate, of which the other components were Daver, the Minister of

Justice, and Firuz Mirza, the Minister of Finance, who was lately convicted of fraud and sentenced to four months' imprisonment.

Since the fall of the latter the effect of years of overwork on the health of H.H. Teymourtache is becoming more and more apparent, though, refusing the assistance of a secretary on the grounds that there is no one whom he can trust, this superman still compresses into one day more than the average Persian could accomplish in a month. It may be at his instance that the Shah has recalled Firoughi from Angora to become first Minister of the newly-founded Department of Economics and subsequently Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the man who, above all others, has a reputation for scrupulous honesty, Také Zadeh Khan, from London, to become Minister of Communications.

An election is pending, but this is not of much importance, for Persia has not yet reached that stage of democratic development when a free ballot is either necessary or desirable. The result of an election is pre-arranged, and there is no genuine opposition in the Mejlis, whose hundred and thirty members pass the Bills in which the Shah is interested under the heading of "Double-urgency"—which means that they become law a few hours after their first presentation.

While discussing the railway in which the Shah is particularly interested, for he feels it is of strategic as well as commercial importance, his Majesty expressed his disappointment with the way in which the work on the southern trial sector has been carried out. It is true that the construction was hurried ahead of the time stipulated in the contract, but when I saw the line, bridges were falling because their width had been gauged by the summer rather than the winter measurements of the streams they spanned—cement supports had been split by the force of unprecedented floods—the embankments were sagging owing to lack of ballast, and some of the rails, expanding at a temperature of 120° F., had sprung away from the sleepers.

"It is necessary for Persia to have a port of her

own," said the Shah, referring to the construction of Bandar Shapur. "We cannot be wholly dependent on Russia for the marketing of our produce. The new road from Tabriz to the Mosul railway will offer an alternative to merchants in Azerbaijan, and I hope eventually to see a line connecting Tehran with the West, possibly in co-operation with Turkey, with a port on the Black Sea or the Mediterranean. We need an outlet towards Europe, and the projected main line is, I hope, only the beginning of a railway system which will give Persia a chance of exporting in whatever direction she chooses."

In conclusion, the Shah stated his conviction that the questions at issue between Persia and England could be satisfactorily settled. "Our relations are most friendly and our interests have much in common," he said. "Certain adjustments must be made, for Persia has a right to exclusive sovereignty in her own territorial waters, but they will be gradual, and in no way will they disturb the good understanding which should exist between neighbours and potential allies."

I left the Shah standing on a marble porch hung like the nest of an eagle over descending terraces. Behind him was an audience room, panelled and roofed with encrusted mirrors, whose thousand facets reflected the sun. Below him Tehran in the plain was spread like an historical carpet. In the distance Mount Demavend, the Fujiyama of Persia, raised a dazzling white cone above successive ranges. His Majesty called me back to admire the view. A military 'plane wheeled into the sky, and the Shah watched its flight. "The army has been the first step," he said. "It has prepared the ground."

"And fenced it. . . ." I interpolated. The Shah smiled.

"I am a soldier, not a diplomat," he said.

CHAPTER XVIII

AZERBAIJAN AND THE RUSSO-ARMENIAN FRONTIER

FROM Tehran to Kazvin the road is good. Aboard an Armenian lorry laden with bales of cotton, we rattled along at a good pace.

Muharram was just over and the driver told me how at Zinjan, a peaceful looking village which seemed to be wrapped in the slumber of ages, a policeman had been killed because he tried to regulate the procession, which was accompanied by a crowd who had armed themselves with staves and stones and resisted all interference on the part of harassed officials.

At Kazvin, he said, six hundred men had taken part in four processions, which followed each other down the great tree-lined boulevards. Preceded by headless dummy corpses, rows of white-robed figures staggered arm in arm. Each man carried a sword, and to the cry of "Ya, Ya, Husayn!" the linked arms flew up, the steel bit into bare foreheads and blood dripped on to the chests of the fanatics.

The police had wisely commandeered every carriage in the town and into these were ignominiously heaped one on top of another like game after a battue, all who fell by the way. The victims of religious hysteria were hurried to the police-station and the more seriously wounded, numbering fifty-three, were sorted out and sent to hospital, where six of them died. But when we drove into Kazvin, just as the electric lights picked out the public gardens and gave shape to the dice-board of new streets, there was no sign of such conflict. The old world was confined to a scene lit for a moment by the lamps of our lorry, for on the outskirts of the town there is a mosque which looks as if it had sprung out of the desert. Round it clustered the tents and shelters

of many pilgrims. Camels were groaning beside their loads. A dervish, scarred and half-naked, spun in the centre of a group who acclaimed his frenzied gyrations. A story-teller was recounting the tragedy of Husayn to a breathless audience whose emotion broke into sighs and cries of "Oh, martyred one! Oh, blessed!"

Kazvin was built by Shapur II and captured in 1078 by Hasan Sabeh, chief of the Assassins, from whom are descended the Moslem sect of the Hashahin. His famous castle of Alamut is barely thirty miles away in the mountains. It was there that his followers, drugged with hashish, were taken to a fabulous garden and initiated into the joys which would be theirs in paradise, before being dispatched on their blood-thirsty errands. Hasan Sabeh was known to the Crusaders as Sheikh el Jebel, which has been rudely translated into "Old Man of the Mountains." He was the Macchiavelli of the East and to him may be attributed a series of murders and sudden deaths which shook the mediæval world and gained a superhuman reputation for the sect of which he was the founder and the Prophet.

Kazvin knew the raids and rebellions common to all Persian history. The Afghans took the city in 1722 and the Turks in 1725. Haroun er Rashid built its mosque, the Masjid el Jama, and Tahmasp the palace, of which only one gate survives, but the Kazvin of to-day has turned its back on the beauty and the barbarity of the East. At the junction of three main roads, it occupies itself with producing textiles and carpets, with the cultivation of grapes and with a modern cloth factory organized by Germans. It possesses the best hotel in Persia and though its chief trade at present is the export of dried fruits to Russia, Kazvin looks west and south along the new routes which will soon connect it with Iraq and the Gulf.

Our next halting-place was Miana, famous in all records of Persian travel for its bugs which are supposed only to bite strangers. The village is approached by way of a gorge which in moonlight offers a series of Rackhamesque effects. As we slipped round incredible

corners, where the road hesitates on the brink of disaster, I had an impression of thousands of dark camels padding silently through a fearful land. Sleeping figures were huddled among the merchandise. Crags rose sharply behind them. They were white and arid as the mountains of the moon. As one terrific angle made way for another and the road seemed to apologize for being there at all, our headlights chased an army of shadows leaping fantastically from one cardboard precipice to another. Caverns gaped under chaotic and quite impossible combinations of rock; and all the time the silent caravans, from Trebizond and Erzerum, those closed mysterious places to which Turkey refuses access, surged along the river bed.

Miana has a garage which is new and splendid. Its poles and roods of white wall are significantly solid, for in Persia modernity is as carefully fenced as the old, barred anderun. The country has not yet got away from the idea that property necessitates a wall, whereas America, model and goal of young Persia, wastes neither building material nor energy. Each of her structures, commercial or domestic, stares unhedged into the windows of its neighbours.

At Miana there is also a telegraph khané, fortified as any mediæval castle and commanding an excellent view of the intimacies of the village roofs where the whole population was asleep—in moonlight and every variety of wadded wrapping.

The telegraphist, roused from slumber by an interested delegation, assured me politely that there was "a very clean room entirely fit" for my occupation. We climbed up to it. A man was sleeping therein, stertorously and very much out-sprawled. Unceremoniously, he was dragged from "the very clean room" and his bedding tossed out of the window after him. My own sleep was subsequently punctuated by my predecessor's meek return in search of one indiscreet possession after another.

At the hour when London goes, belatedly, to bed, we set forth on the last lap to Tabriz. I forget which

day it was that we broke a spring, but I know it took four hours to mend and that within half that time it had broken again and been tied up with rope. Fortunately, however, on this particular road there are a string of small, Armenian restaurants where one can go into the kitchen and choose the food one requires—and very good food, too—from a row of pots simmering on a clay hearth.

Within twenty miles of Tabriz our lorry stuck in a stream which happened to cross the road, and the passengers were obliged to spend a couple of hours digging it out. Consequently, as usual, it was evening when we approached the town.

Tabriz or Taures, looks as if it had been flattened neatly into shape within a frill of very red mountains. On the top of one of these is a miraculous monastery whose saint still commits various marvels for the benefit of the few who are energetic enough to visit him.

I was just thinking that I had never seen so flat a town when the patriarch of all dust-storms arose. Within sixty seconds, the air was black and the whole of the mobile contents of the streets were whirling through it. All that which should have been under our wheels was plastered on our faces. Blinded, choking, we crawled through an atmosphere which had become tangible and articulate. It flung itself at us, shrieking and flapping all sorts of horrible missiles. Stray animals were driven against us. Through what might have been a London fog we saw a welter of human beings blown where the storm listed, or heaped incontinently among other debris. "The devil himself is in it," muttered the driver, who was a free-thinker.

Tabriz has played a part in so many different histories. The town was held in turn by Arabs, Seljuks, Ottomans, Persians, and Russians. It has been the prey of one earthquake after another. During the cataclysm of 1721, no fewer than eighty thousand people were killed and half that number perished during the succeeding shock of 1870.

In the fifteenth century the place was ruled alternately by the Kurdish dynasties known as the Black Sheep and the White Sheep, and it was Shah Jehan (1437 to 1468), last Monarch of the former house, who built the famous Blue Mosque, *chef d'œuvre* of ceramics. It is still known as the "Sunni Mosque," in memory of the days when this form of Islam was the national faith, before the quickening of that fierce hatred which for centuries embittered the relations between Iranian Shias and the Sunnis across the Turkish border. In 1507 a merchant wrote of the Tabrizi women: "They are white as snow. Their dress is . . . open at the breast showing their bosoms and even their bodies, the whiteness of which resembles ivory," and in the seventeenth century Tavernier recorded: "Money ttots about in that place more than in any other," so the glamour and prosperity of Tabriz are of no recent origin.

The town was captured, unresisting, by Russia in 1827, and restored to Persia when peace was signed in the same year, and the next event of tragic importance which occurred within its walls was the martyrdom of the Bab, Mirza Ali Mohamed, on the 9th of July, 1850. This strange and fervent young visionary, rebel against the narrow materialism of Islam, was the son of a cloth merchant in Shiraz. Born in 1820, he occupied his early manhood with prolonged pilgrimages to Mecca, Kerbela and Najaf before, in 1844, he proclaimed himself "the Gate" (Bab) "of Spiritual Truth."

The following year, at the instigation of the Mullahs, he was imprisoned at Shiraz, but during the plague which raged in 1847, he escaped to Isfahan, from where he was sent under escort to the capital. In spite of official hostility, he received a tremendous ovation at every village through which he passed and for this reason, perhaps, he was incarcerated in the fortress of Chihrik near Lake Urmeya. A year later, there was a general rebellion among Babis in Yezd, Niriz, Zinjan and Mazanderan, with the result that their Prophet was condemned to death with two disciples, one of whom temporarily recanted and was reprieved, to be martyred

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OUR LORRY IN DIFFICULTIES NEAR TABRIZ

later in the furious persecution to which the death of Mirza Ali Mohamed was the prelude. So splendid a heroism was displayed by the disciples of a creed which preaches above all things, tolerance, simplicity and obedience to existing temporal authority, that it is sad to chronicle a schism which eventually split the followers of the young cloth merchant into Babis, Behais and Ezelis. Each of these acknowledge a different leader, of whom the best known, Mirza Husayn Ali of Nur, Beha 'ullah (Splendour of God), established the headquarters of Behai-ism at Acre, where he lived till 1892, being succeeded by the admirable old man whom England knighted for his services to peace and who was visited at Haifa by pilgrims from all over America.

Tabriz is the second largest town in Persia. It has a population of a hundred and eighty thousand and is the capital of a province largely of Turkish or Tartar origin, with a considerable proportion of Armenians, Kurds and Nestorian Christians. It may be, it probably is Persian in sentiment, but in character it is of a hardier and more resistant quality. The Turkish element in Azerbaijan is stubborn and self-reliant. It has neither the charm nor the irritating unreliability of the subtle, adaptable, gentle, and none too courageous Iranian. In Tabriz there are none of the weak jaws and drooping lips common in the rest of Persia. The tribesmen are strong, squat and small, with hard masculine faces and an air of vigour. Even the townsmen possess some share of those active qualities which the Shah must have inherited from the province to which he belongs. A current proverb declares that: "Tabriz is different to the rest of Persia. Here things are done before a man has time to grow hair."

The men of Azerbaijan are fighters. Behind them they have the traditions of a warrior race, which gained its living as mercenaries, or by raiding the caravan routes by which the trade of the Ottoman Empire went Eastwards to India, and to-day the mountains of Kara Dagh are as natural a defence against Russia as Mount Ararat against Turkey.

Azerbaijan has recently suffered from an earthquake, which destroyed the town of Dilman and a hundred and twenty villages, and while I was in Tabriz there were two minor shocks.

At that time—June, 1930—along her Western frontier the semi-independent Kurds of Ararat were fighting the Turks with considerable success.

Her Northern frontier, which since the end of the Russo-Persian war in 1829, has consisted of the River Aras and the no man's land within the plain of Moughan, was the scene of continual conflict between the Soviet and its Armenian and Moslem subjects. The whole province was overrun with fugitives, of whom it was estimated that something like ten thousand had crossed the Russian frontier within the last few months.

Yet Azerbaijan is one of the most progressive provinces in Persia. Trade is almost entirely in the hands of Armenians, who are thrifty and energetic. The Military Commander, General Zafar-i-Dowleh, is a man of initiative and strong purpose, and it is at his instance —for he realizes the vital importance to a triangular frontier province of good roads—that Také Zadeh Khan (Minister of Communications in Tehran) is considering the possibility of an annual labour tax, consisting of so many days' work per head on roads and bridges.

Education is making great strides under the able administration of Dr. Ahmed Khan Mohseni, who has instituted sixty new schools during the last four years. According to him, only five per cent. of contemporary Persia is litetate, but Azerbaijan is leading the way with a total of a hundred and fifty schools, of which twenty are specially for the tribes. A college of technical and other trades is being started at Tabriz to train the youth of the town as carpenters, electro-mechanics, tanners, cobblers, engineers and so on. In fact, the capital of Azerbaijan is living up to its wide, modern streets (one of which is seven miles long), and its air of a Continental town. There are several open-air restaurants, and the streets are thronged with an alert,

quickly-moving crowd, altogether more purposeful than is to be seen in Southern Persia.

Of the citadel built by Ali Shah, there remains nothing but a vast block of masonry a hundred and twenty feet high with walls twenty-five feet thick at the base. From its summit, in the days of old Persia, unfaithful wives used to be hurled to a horrible death until, according to legend, one lady was supported by the wind in her multitudinous petticoats, so that she landed lightly as a balloon. To-day, under the comfortable shade of the parapet which saw so many executions, prosperous citizens provide their sparsely veiled wives and daughters with tea to the sound of Blues on a gramophone, or jazz interpreted by a military band.

When Tabriz decided on her new, straight avenues, for the construction of which it was necessary to destroy half-a-dozen mosques and any number of private houses, no compensation being paid, the leaders of a retrogressive opposition were arrested by orders of the late Governor and exiled all in a single night. Subsequently the province has been called upon to deal, as summarily, with other and far greater difficulties.

Since the beginning of 1930, when the Soviet Government decided to enforce collective farming in the Caucasus, Russian Armenia has been the scene of continuous fighting. A large proportion of the population is at present living in the inaccessible mountain districts, from which the lukewarm attacks of the Red Army and the more vigorous offensive of the G.P.U. have failed to dislodge it. Whole villages have been destroyed. In the area of Nekhooy a semi-independent régime has been established, and bands of Moslem raiders threaten the security of the Julfa-Tiflis railway line, which is guarded by posts armed with Maxim guns and patrolled by armoured trains.

For the first time in history it would appear that Christians and Moslems have joined issue in a common cause, and one of the most successful bands is led by a Gregorian priest and a Turkish mullah, who insist

on all members swearing an oath of brotherhood on the Bible and the Koran.

With growing disorder on the other side of a frontier that is purely arbitrary, since it has no ethnographical justification, it is inevitable that Persian Azerbaijan should suffer from the repercussion. The Moslem tribes along both sides of the border are of the same blood. Their traditions and modes of life are identical, and the same applies to the Armenians, whether they happen to have settled in Erivan or Tabriz.

Under the impression that armed rebels were being deliberately sheltered by the Persian Government in order to foster an anti-Russian feeling along the frontier, the Soviet authorities recently addressed two strongly-worded notes of protest to Tehran. These remained unanswered, as is apt to be the Persian habit, but steps were taken to arrest any armed refugees who lingered in the vicinity of Persian posts. Those who reached the almost impenetrable mountain zone centring on the Pass of Aher were beyond the reach of any government, unless an army were to be employed, or unless the Shahsewand tribe chose to be false to its traditional hospitality.

It is certain that bands of Caucasian refugees, the majority of whom were Moslems, having escaped across the frontier early in May were in the habit of operating from the vicinity of these mountains, just within Persian territory, in order, in the course of swift raids across the river, to rescue their families and, if possible, some of their property. It is said among the mountaineers that the number of such militant refugees amounted to three or four thousand. At the end of May, 1930, a band of fifty of these outlaws, whom the Persian Government was no more anxious to have within its territories than was the Russian, crossed the frontier bridge at Zinjezur, and, meeting a Red Army patrol, kept up a running fight to cover its retreat, in which twenty Russian soldiers and an officer were killed.

The result was that three thousand Soviet troops were dispatched to Zinjezur with pontoon bridges

PERSIAN TROOPS IN AZERBAIJAN

that were brought down the scarcely completed railway line from Baku, which it had been previously stated was to be used solely for "commercial purposes." On the night of June 3 between five and six hundred cavalry crossed the river, obviously with the purpose of rounding up any bands of Russian refugees which might have their headquarters in the vicinity. Owing to the Persian Government having failed to inform her Soviet neighbour that several of the militant refugee leaders were already in prison in Tabriz, it is probable that the raid had the further purpose of discovering non-existent proofs of Persian complicity.

According to General Zafar-i-Dowleh, two thousand five hundred Russian troops eventually crossed the frontier with Maxim guns and a field battery.

The inhabitants of the frontier villages relate that on June 4, Russian cavalry penetrated approximately twenty kilometres into Persian territory and pillaged five hamlets. At Vineh they burned the houses of two wealthy Armenian merchants, the Tomaniany brothers, whom they suspected of harbouring refugees, but those cellars contained nothing more revolutionary than a hundred khawars (six hundred and fifty pounds each) of corn, the total village supply for the rest of the year. This grain was destroyed and from the surrounding province of Kara Dagh some fifteen hundred head of cattle and sheep were taken and driven back across the river. The Persian blockhouses along the Aras, which were very lightly manned, were surrounded and disarmed, while the officer in charge was taken prisoner.

Surprised in the middle of the night, and believing that they were being attacked by bandits, some of the villagers offered a mild resistance, with the result that ten Persian subjects were killed, including three women and two children. Several others were wounded. The telegraph and telephone wires were cut. The local notables were collected, including a village Mayor and the khan (headman) of a tribal sub-section who was at Vineh, and together with such isolated refugees as happened to be in the neighbourhood were taken into

Russian territory. The total number of hostages forcibly removed across the Aras is said to number ninety-seven. The only armed refugee who was discovered, a Moslem who had taken part in the recent guerrilla warfare, was shot on the spot, and, according to villagers who were eye-witnesses, other fugitives who were unarmed and could therefore offer no resistance, were beaten, the back of one being broken.

When this news reached Tabriz, General Zafar-i-Dowleh immediately recalled the contingent of Persian troops which, by agreement with the Turks, had been sent to Maku, on the Western frontier, to prevent the entry of Kurdish fugitives from the Mount Ararat zone. The garrison of Tabriz numbers between a thousand and fifteen hundred, but there were something over six thousand troops within the province. These were ordered to concentrate at various points from which rapid transit to the frontier could be arranged, and the General left immediately for Aher, which small town is at the head of one of the two main passes commanding the frontier.

The surrounding country is a succession of *cols* impossible for any invading force to occupy without heavy artillery. Here the thousand men who had been able to muster within twenty-four hours were reinforced by members of the Shahsewand tribe, who are excellent fighters and who supplied an irregular force of light cavalry during the 1929 operations against the Persian Kurds.

These men were set to fortify the entrance to the pass, and in some places triple lines of trenches soon existed, while the tribe was organized and armed to prevent a recurrence of a raid which altogether failed in its object, since the Persian Government had given no assistance to armed refugees and had issued strict orders that all fugitives were to be arrested and examined. But it is absolutely impossible, given the intimate connexion between the populations of the two frontier provinces, for a humanitarian government to return defenceless Armenian merchants, students, workmen, priests, lawyers and teachers, Moslem farmers and peasants, men, women, and children, many of them

PERSIAN TROOPS CROSSING A MOUNTAIN BRIDGE

wounded or half-starved, to the summary vengeance of the Cheka. All that Russia can fairly ask is that fugitives should be disarmed and distributed through areas as far as possible removed from the frontier.

Naturally, when news of the raid reached Tabriz, followed by reports that, though the Soviet troops had withdrawn across the frontier, they had left a line of machine-guns to defend it by means of an intermittent barrage which prevented all approach, it was feared that worse might follow, especially as out of a band of a hundred refugees who fought their way down to the river and tried to cross it under the concentrated fire of several patrols, only fourteen succeeded in reaching Persian territory alive. Some of these found their way to the capital with tales which added to the dismay induced by the sound of the Soviet bombardment clearly distinguishable from such villages as Ushdebin.

However, within the next few days reassuring reports drifted across the mountains, though all communications with the frontier were temporarily closed. It was shortly known that all but twelve of the hostages had been returned. The Persian officer had been released and the cattle returned, proof of its abstraction being plainly visible in the form of the Soviet collective mark with which every animal had already been branded.

If the raid failed to disclose any suggestion of official Persian hostility towards the Soviet, it provided the Azerbaijan authorities with irrefutable proof that Russia would welcome the overthrow of the first stable Government that Persia has known since the beginning of the war. For leaflets were found, and promptly sent to Tehran, which, written for the benefit of the uneducated masses in Persia, suggested that conditions would be improved, taxation decreased, and an era of unbelievable prosperity inaugurated should the "mixed races at present constituting an unnatural capitalistic State" unite (for the last time, presumably!) in order to accomplish the downfall of a government which, without exaggeration, may be said to be responsible for all that is good in modern Persia.

CHAPTER XIX

RUSSIAN TALES: THE PRIEST, THE KULAK AND THE UKRANIAN MECHANIC

TO the Turko-Persian population of Tabriz has been added within the last few months a host of refugees. The garden of the Armenian school has become an encampment where, in temporary shelters, Russians of all classes and occupations are herded among the incongruous possessions they managed to save. The majority of them are penniless. Many of them are insufficiently clothed.

Last summer the garden might well have represented a dramatization of shipwreck, while in winter the conditions must be intolerable.

The large Armenian colony, headed by the Patriarch, had contributed generously to the installation and support of their countrymen from the other side of the Aras river, but every day the Russian exodus continued, gaining new momentum with each Chekist success.

The Persian Government was faced with an unnatural problem, for it had no work to offer the refugees and no funds on which to draw for their maintenance. It could not justifiably return them to the prisons, or the graves which awaited them North of the Aras and at the same time the last thing it could contemplate with equanimity was the nucleus of half-starving unemployed forming, not only at Tabriz, but in all the frontier villages.

While I was in Azerbaijan, fugitives were daily crossing the river, sometimes under fire from the Chekist guards, and finding their way, via the village police-stations where they were generally held for

several days until they could satisfy the authorities with regard to their status and intentions, to the tragic garden in Tabriz.

Sitting on a bench or a packing case, surrounded by every kind of shelter, some made of a couple of quilts suspended from a tree, others of a mattress walled in with petrol tins, one or two of rotten boards, the interstices stuffed with grass, I heard some of the stories which follow.

Later on, I moved up-country and interviewed the fugitives within a few hours of their leaving Russian territory.

Obviously, the tales lose much by interpretation, though the various Armenians who were kind enough to help me endeavoured to extract consecutive and reliable narratives from men and women still dazed by the misadventures which had befallen them. Sometimes we spent many hours and an infinity of patience fitting together the story of a peasant or a mechanic whose bursts of speech were incoherent and whose information had to be confirmed by taciturn or loquacious companions. Equally obviously, the human jetsam from whom these tales were obtained represent but one facet of Sovietism. They record the failures of an inhuman mechanical system which scraps what it does not need or cannot use, irrespective of individual suffering, but I have no means of knowing what percentage of waste material is thus discarded.

One of the refugees with whom I spoke, said to me: "There are to-day, three Russias. There is the ten-day tourist Russia, which you see from the windows of a steam-heated train-de-luxe or a sight-seeing car. That is just a fake, staged like any other propaganda. Then there is this tragic Russia personified by the refugees, a mass of humanity broken and thrown away. But that also is immaterial. Behind and beyond these unrepresentative aspects, there is the real Russia which is evolving a new conception of humanity. It is that which you ought to see and it is in the minds and the hands of the new generation."

It is that Russia I wanted to see, for even in the terrible stories of the refugees, one sensed the existence of some productive force, merciless as all creation, which might eventually justify its Jesuitical expediency, but the Soviet Government refused me a visa.

So I had to be content with what I heard tell in the Armenian garden at Tabriz or among the villages which, in Northern Azerbaijan, listened for the sound of Baghiroff's guns across the legendary Araxes.

Here are a few of the tales:

The Priest

He was from the district of Kiev, in the Ukraine, and we will call him Father Mihailoff. He belonged to the Orthodox Church, was fifty-two years old, and spoke with decision and authority, in spite of his wild appearance. His long, black hair was matted and streaked with white. He was small, and obviously very tired, but his eyes might have been those of the Baptist. He was blessed not only with faith, but with the conviction that the cause he served was indestructible.

"The persecution of the Church in Russia may be divided into three phases," he explained. "During the first, which lasted from 1919 to 1923, priests were treated as vermin. They were arrested and executed without any trial at all. All the time they were at the mercy of informers and punitive detachments, who had the right to deal summarily with anyone suspected of religious sentiments. During those days, not only priests, but whole congregations were slaughtered or imprisoned without any form of trial. A wave of terror spread over the country. Nobody dared go to church. To save their lives, the people denounced God and all His ministers.

"The second period began in 1924, and terminated three years later. The Communist policy had changed.

Note.—All the names in the Russian stories are spelt phonetically according to the pronunciation of Armenian interpreters.

ARMENIAN REFUGEES AT TABRIZ, INCLUDING THE LAWYER (ON RIGHT) AND THE SECRET AGENT (IN CENTRE)

FUGITIVES FROM THE CAUCASUS IN TABRIZ

The government imposed exorbitant taxation on everything and everybody connected with the Church, and sought to turn people from it by mental suasion. The Bezbozknik, the Anti-God Society, was started, at first unofficially, but it soon became a government organ, with a membership of two and a half millions. Now it is issuing a free daily paper with a circulation of several millions, and by this means, as well as by appeals on the wireless, it hopes to increase its membership to fifteen millions.

"During the second period there was an intensive cultural campaign, which it was hoped would oust all forms of superstition from the public mind, and instil it with the materialism which is the goal of the Soviet authorities. There was an immense amount of non-violent, anti-religious propaganda, in which posters, leaflets, cinema, wireless, and public libraries took part.

"You must remember newspapers and printing-presses are entirely controlled by the government, and they were kept busy ridiculing the Church as something out of date—a superstition injurious to people's minds and an opiate to their intelligence. Anti-religious discussions were instituted in every possible centre on such subjects as 'Does God exist or not?' 'Is there any proof that we are more than animal?' and so on.

"The young people became interested. They read Darwin. At that time he was probably one of the most popular authors in Russia. In the schools and clubs, at meetings, in welfare centres and social circles, discussion raged among the young, and the Church could take no part in it. Its schools were closed. All its usual activities were forbidden. It might not dispense spiritual or material help. Its finances were broken, and as a result of years of persecution it must be confessed that its moral was affected. Many of the priests were very bitter, not only against the government, but against the congregations which had deserted them.

"The third period began in February, 1927, when the government announced that the Church was the

last obstacle in the way of Socialism, and constituted the final remains of a capitalist system. It must definitely and categorically be destroyed. The Anti-God department of State was instituted under Yaroslavsky. Since then the lives of priests have become almost impossible, unless they agree to the conditions laid down by the Soviet Government and interpreted by the Archbishop Sergius, who is their tool, either because he believes it to be the only way of saving the remnants of the Church in Russia, or because he wishes to remain at its head.

"Since 1927, priests are never allowed to stay for more than a few months in one place, so that there is no chance of their acquiring any influence over the people. Probably they don't even know who believes and who doesn't, for the peasants are too terrified to say.

"I will tell you my own case. I had a parish of about eight thousand people, from whom I received three thousand roubles a year, of which ten per cent. was taken in taxation. But in 1927 some government officials came to see me and told me that unless I would sign a 'voluntary' statement to the effect that I was willing to contribute half what remained to the government funds, I must leave the parish.

"I agreed, and was left in peace for a few months. Then I was told that I must repair the church, and that the government would fix the amount to be spent and send a contractor to carry out the work, but that I must provide the material and the wages. How could I do this? Where could I get the money? No materials were available, and I was not allowed to raise any subscription except the offertory.

"By this time, of course, the church was not a very bright or cheerful place—its contents had all been stolen and I had no money to buy fuel to heat it. There were no vestments and no incense. The interior was cold and shabby, and this affected the spirits of the congregation. Many of them were afraid to come, because if they were seen at a service by the spies who

were always with us there would be a black mark against their names; they would never get government employment, and their property was liable to be confiscated.

"However, I did manage to collect a little money secretly, and the work began; but the government fixed the amount to be spent at ten thousand roubles,* and they arranged a time limit and made me sign a contract promising that the repairs would be completed by that date. Of course, it was impossible, because the contractor had no intention of hurrying the work, and the money was soon finished. I could not get any more, and then the government told me that I must insure the church for double and treble its value, at exorbitant rates, which they would fix. Otherwise it would be confiscated and closed.

"I said I would find the money somehow, and so I managed to keep the church open till January, 1929; but the work was not finished, and I could not insure it, so at last I was arrested and sent to the monastery on the island of Solovets, near Archangel, which is used as a prison for Kulaks, ex-army officers, and those suspected of private business.

"It is a terrible place, without heat or light, and there is snow for ten months of the year. The grey dusk at midday and the soundlessness of the snow are like a muffler, so that men died from the terror of it, believing they were already dead.

"Near Archangel there are hundreds of kulaks and men who once owned small businesses, condemned to forced labour in the timber forests. By this means it is possible for Russia to undersell Sweden, Finland and Canada in spite of the cost of transport. Last year" (1929) "she effected a drop of £2 a standard" (this measure equals a hundred and sixty-five cubic feet) "and disorganized the whole market, in order that she might pay for the wheat she was obliged to import."

I asked if priests were still executed without trial.

"No," replied Father Mihailoff, "there are very few

* 10 roubles (1930) = £1

executions at all, nowadays. In order to propitiate European public opinion, executions are reduced to a minimum. Even after a so-called 'counter-revolutionary' has been condemned in a public trial the sentence of death is often remitted and the convicted individual is sent to some prison where he disappears."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"It is my opinion," said the priest, "that at Solovets and in some of the other political prisons those convicts whose death sentences have been remitted are inoculated with some bacteria that kills them quietly and without any fuss, so that the prison authorities in due course are able to regret their demise."

"Do you know that happens?" I inquired.

Father Mihailoff smiled, but it was a movement of the lips which did not affect the rest of his face.

"How did you leave Solovets?" I asked, curious to know how he escaped.

"I was sent to Moscow and offered a bishopric if I would sign a form agreeing to accept the authority of the Archbishop Sergius. I refused, because I cannot see that it is possible to make terms with the Bolsheviks while they deny God. I may be wrong. It may be the Archbishop is right—he is very wise. But for me it is impossible.

"I was then sent to a Moscow prison, where I found myself in a cell with three officers. They had friends in the army and were able eventually to arrange our escape; but it took us six months to get across Russia, and I crossed the frontier by the 'regular' means of which you've already heard."

I asked Father Mihailoff why the persecution of the Church in Russia had not made martyrs instead of Atheists, for human obstinacy is such that once it is denied a creed, it has hitherto always been ready to sacrifice itself and anything else in order to achieve that which is forbidden.

The priest replied: "The moujik was intensely superstitious, but I doubt if he was religious by in-

dividual conviction. Rob him of the trappings of his religion, the authority of the priestly hierarchy, the beauty of his church, the colour and the music and the miracles in which he put his faith, and there is nothing left to attract him.

"To his mind God was not strong enough to save him from persecution. So perhaps, after all, there was no God. He knew so little about the Deity except what was represented to him by the power and ubiquity of the Church, and all that is gone. Some keep their ikons and some believe that Lenin is the greatest of the saints; but the whole matter is in abeyance. The moujik is used to submission."

"And the young people?" I asked.

"That is a different question. In the towns you will hardly find a boy or a girl who believes, because it is old-fashioned to be religious. It is 'bad form.' In the country some of the girls cling to a muddled conception of religion, but most of them follow their brothers in thinking the whole thing a fairy story. They would be as ashamed to read the Bible as Hans Andersen, for all their friends, especially those in the party—Pioneers, Octobrists, Young Communists, affiliates to the party and to its various unions, clubs, and societies—are studying science.

"In Russia it is the popularization of science and the growth of materialism which have destroyed religion as much as any persecution. The word 'science' is holy in contemporary Russia, and the passionate devotion that used to prostrate itself before the altar marches to-day at the head of a revolutionary procession. The power of self-sacrifice is still there, but it has been diverted into a secular channel.

"Faith without understanding is apt to burn dim. The average uneducated Russian never understood the meaning of the Church ceremonies at which he assisted. Perhaps he thought his grain would not grow unless he contributed an Easter offering, but he has now discovered that it does!

"Bibles have been used to light the fires, because

it was discovered they had no power of miraculous intervention. With the educated—and they are increasing every year, Karl Marx has taken the place of the Gospel, and he is much easier to understand."

The Kulak

Atanas, aged sixty, was a Kulak from Mesra, in the district of Ghapan. He looked much older than his age. The coat which he wore over a tattered blouse had long since ceased to have any particular shape or colouring. His grizzled hair was a thicket, out of which peered a lean, brown face, and the mild, kindly eyes of the peasant who has lived on and for the soil, and who knows nothing beyond the simple agricultural routine.

"Before the war I had forty 'dessiatines,'" (about 2⅔ acres) he said, in a very gentle voice without a note of complaint, "but in April last year" (1929) "the government confiscated all but eleven. Still, up to February, I was left with my cattle, and with my two sons to help me I could make some sort of a living, though for the last six years I've been of the voteless class, deprived of all privileges.

"It was on February 2, 1930, that a man from the Cheka, accompanied by a representative of the local police" (Melisha) "came to our village and told us that the government had determined to institute collective farming. They called a meeting of all the villagers and persuaded them it was a good thing to give up their cattle voluntarily. 'Those who join will be known as the right-hand men of the government, and those who refuse will be accused of anti-Bolshevism,' they said.

"And, of course, out of fear, everyone said they would join. I offered to do so with the rest, but I had eighteen oxen and cows, one horse, one mule, and thirty-five sheep, so I was told I belonged to the class of well-to-do persons who were to be excluded from the Soviet farms.

"On February 28th all my animals were confiscated, and my sons were arrested on the grounds that the whole family was anti-Bolshevik. Immediately I went to the local Spalkom, who was also the representative of the Cheka, and tried to explain to him that my sons had no politics at all. They were farmers, like myself; they knew all about sowing and shearing and nothing at all about party affairs. But it was no use, and as I left the office I was warned by a local Turk that the G.P.U. were after me, too.

"So I went away secretly that night and took refuge in the Moslem village of Dar Zalul, where I remained hidden for some days. Then on March 13th the G.P.U. men came to arrest the Turkish family who were sheltering me, and the men had only just time to get away to the hills. I was too late, so the women hid me in between some bedding" (the thick wadded quilts under and on which the peasants sleep), "and then they locked the door, and arming themselves with sticks, they stood in front of it and told the Cheka people: 'You can only come in over our dead bodies. Our men are gone and the house is empty, but we will fight you with stones rather than let you come in.'

"The policemen went away, but they came back secretly that night. However, by then I was on my way to the mountains, where for some time I hid in an old working near the copper mine of Hankir, which is now being worked by the Soviet—they have built a narrow-gauge line to connect it with the new railway from Baku to Julfa."

The old man was so thin that he looked hollow. In his very quiet and resigned voice, he continued: "The Moslem villagers always helped me. They are great fighters and they never give up a fugitive, but I had to live mostly in the forest and eat anything I could find.

"When at last I found a Turk who knew where the river could be crossed in safety, I had only a few roubles left. He took thirty of them, but he helped me to swim the Aras. Part of the way he carried me

on his back, and then, when I reached the Persian side, I had to pay five roubles as a landing-tax, so now I have nothing, and the last time I heard of my sons they were in a Moscow prison. My wife and two daughters-in-law and four grandchildren are left in the Caucasus without any means of existence. With many other women they have gone to the mountains saying they cannot bear to look upon the face of a Bolshevik.

"In the Caucasian villages there used to be many affiliated to the party and working strongly for it because they believed it was the good thing for which they had waited, but now there are in each village only three or four genuine Communists, and these cannot see beyond their own noses, for they still hope for a miracle. There is no longer any zeal for Bolshevism in the Caucasus, and many of the people think 1930 will be the last year. Only thirty-five per cent. of the grain area has been cultivated this summer, and there must be a terrible famine in the winter.

"Hundreds of women and children are in the forests, living like animals. If only each district had a leader, everyone would fight, even if they had only sticks and stones. Since Stalin's decree some time in March, offers have been made to the peasants to return and work their own farms, but the people tell the G.P.U.: 'No, we do not trust you. We would rather stay out of your reach in the mountains.'

"The G.P.U. are always with the Red Army. Not a leaf moves without their knowing. Even the Commissars are under the close supervision of the Cheka, but still there are many cases in which the Red Army will not fire on unarmed villagers.

"Since 1925, the church in our village has been closed, and nobody knows if a man is religious or not. The peasants where I live, at least the older ones, believe firmly in their religion, but there is no centre for its practice and no outward sign to remind people, so the young ones have almost forgotten what the church meant.

"The marriage ceremony is absolutely forbidden.

There is only a civil certificate called *zags*. You can get it one day and give it back the next. The law insists on this certificate, and those who live together openly without it are put in prison for two or three weeks. But the young people risk it, and there are young Communists who are the fathers of several girls' children at the same time."

The Ukranian Mechanic

Two men came to see me together. One was tall, dark and pale. He looked as if he ought to have been a political agitator on the stage. He had a cough, which evidently irritated his companion. The latter was extremely taciturn, and it was not until he had smoked a dozen cigarettes that I discovered he was a doctor.

The younger was called Potrosoeff, with several Christian names which were unpronounceable. He was twenty-three, and had been employed in a metallurgical works in the Ukraine till, in February, 1930, his father was arrested as a Kulak and sent to Archangel to work in the timber forests, while he himself was dismissed from his factory and deprived of all civil rights.

"I was working at Kaminskee, near Dnieper Petrovak, in a large concern, the Imeni Dezlinskayo, which employed twenty-five thousand men and turned out rails, girders, and round-bar iron, also six-inch and three-inch shell cases. We used to have three shifts, each working eight hours, and a rotary five-day week. When this was first instituted it was an awful affair, for no department could be sure that its full strength would be working at the same time. There was always somebody missing, which meant a lot of delay. But now each factory has its own day of rest, so it is all right as far as they are concerned, but one does not see anything of one's friends or family if they are working elsewhere.

"Kaminskee is a considerable industrial centre, for there is another large works there, the Imeni Gazety

Pravdy, which makes railway trucks, and there are some large new workmen's buildings which contain several hundred rooms. There is a splendid assembly hall fitted with wireless and loud-speakers, where concerts and lectures are given and films shown, but the actual rooms, of which each family gets one, are pretty small, and they rarely contain more than a bedstead, a table, and a couple of hard chairs. Only certain kinds of pictures are allowed, and curtains are considered too luxurious.

"The children have a special portion of the building, where they are all brought up together, and of course all the cooking and washing are done in a collective kitchen and laundry, so the women are left free to work in the various factories and government offices. The comfort and convenience of all these new workmen's flats is concentrated in the public rooms in order to discourage the institution of any sort of home life or the possession of any personal property beyond the barest necessities.

"I've never lived in one of these places, for until it was forcibly collectivized in February, my father had a small farm, and he was able to give me a few roubles a month which, with my salary, enabled me to live with a friend and his wife, but we only had one room for the three of us.

"Work at my factory began at six a.m. and lasted till two p.m., if you happened to be on the morning shift. There was twenty minutes' break at nine-forty a.m., when we had a meal consisting of three-quarters of a pound of black bread—bought the previous day after standing in a queue for a couple of hours—with sausage or dripping, and a mug of tea brewed in the factory samovar.

"There was no milk and very rarely any sugar, because the monthly sugar ration was only sufficient for three or four days, but we never take milk in our tea, so that didn't matter. At two p.m. we used to wash and change our factory clothes, which meant no more than the substitution of a rather cheaper blouse

for the working one, which was the property of the government. At two-thirty we went to the Krasnyi Ugolak" (the Red Corner = club), "for a lecture of forty minutes or so on the Five Years' Plan, or kindred subjects. We had to attend these three days a week, and then, about three-thirty, we were free to go to the Workers' Eating-House, with a ration-card, which entitled the holder to a plate of vegetable soup, with a hundred and fifty grammes of bread and a second course of macaroni in vegetable sauce. All this cost thirty kopeks.*

"If the food in the eating-house happened to have run out, which was a frequent occurrence, we had to stand in a bread queue outside a government shop, which we would not ordinarily do, until the evening, when we had to buy the food for the next day. I should say we used to average at least three hours a day waiting in queues to buy cigarettes, matches, clothing and bread, all of which can only be secured at government shops.

"When a workman buys such clothes on a ticket, he has to write a promise not to dispose of them within a given period to voteless persons, such as merchants, priests, or kulaks.

"In the evenings we used to go to the public gardens in summer and to the club or to a cinema—these were good and cheap—in the winter, because there was nowhere to sit and nothing to do in our room. As a matter of fact, we only had one chair."

"How did you get away from Russia?" I asked.

"My father gave me all his savings before he was arrested, eight hundred roubles, and begged me to leave the country, so I went to Turkestan, having heard that conditions were much better there, but they were worse. The peasants were systematically divided into Kulaki (wealthy), Pod Kulaki (nearly wealthy), Serednyaki (middle), Beduyaki (poor), and Batraki (casual labourers). Each class was fiercely suspicious of the others. The Kulaki were killing their

* 100 kopeks = 1 rouble.

live-stock as fast as they could dispose of the meat to prevent it being forcibly collectivized, and the poorer grades were informing on them and getting shot whenever they were foolish enough to go out at night. In Tashkent the people were standing in bread queues for six and eight hours before they could get any food."

Here the doctor interpolated a few words. "I thought that frontier was the easiest too, so I persuaded the government to send me to Central Asia on a malaria commission, and there I bribed some Turkomans to guide me into Khorasan."

"Why did you want to leave?" I asked the question which was becoming a habit through much repetition.

"I wanted to be free. Everyone in Russia is stifled. Do you realize how lucky you are? You have your own possessions which nobody can take from you. I could not look at one single thing and be sure that it would be mine next week, so I owned nothing at all. It was best. I passed the Military Medical Academy in Moscow, and joined the Army Medical Service. It is far better organized than it was before the war. The old army doctors are retained, and the junior medical officers all have to pass through the academy."

He relapsed into silence, but after considerable encouragement vouchsafed: "The young people in Russia to-day only know the Soviet existence; they can't compare it with life in other countries. They haven't time to use their imagination. They're too busy earning their bread and getting hold of it when they have earned it. They are militarized from start to finish in order that they may be a support to the Red Army in case of war. First they are Oktyabrenck, then Pioneers, then Konsomols or members of the Party, and all the time they are learning to think and act as part of a machine, so that in the end they are the very best material from which to replenish the army. The old intelligentsia are broken. They are incapable of effort. Their schemes are fantastic and only serve to irritate the government."

The Ukranian broke in with: "There are lots of counter-revolutionary societies in my province. They're mostly led by students, and there's a great deal of talk but not much action. That's the result of ten years of Soviet rule—everyone's become articulate."

The doctor suddenly laughed, and it was a most surprising sound, for his face looked stretched and taut as if an ill-considered movement would break the skin.

"Did you hear of Kalinin's speech at some village meeting where he was talking of the blessings of Soviet rule, and a peasant told him: 'Look here, when you and I were lads together you used to chaff me about the number of trousers I possessed. Now I've only got one pair, and they're so patched you can't see the original stuff.' 'You shouldn't complain,' retorted Kalinin. 'In Africa there are millions who haven't any trousers at all.' But the peasant was too sharp for him. 'I didn't know the Soviet had been so successful there,' he said."

CHAPTER XX

RUSSIAN TALES CONTINUED: THE LAWYER, THE STUDENT, THE TECHNICAL EXPERT, THE SECRET AGENT, AND THE MIDDLEMAN

The Lawyer

"I'M twenty-four and I was a lawyer employed by the Soviet Government at Erivan," said Artusha concisely. He was a capable-looking young man with a hard mouth. His eyes were expressionless except when he looked at his emaciated hands which twitched uncontrollably. Then a gleam of contempt showed between the thick short lashes, for he was the sort of man who must often have condemned the "nerves" of others. "I worked in the Superior Court and my salary gradually rose from fifty to a hundred and fifty roubles a month. The cases in which I was concerned were mostly civil disputes between peasants and farmers over boundaries, crops and taxation. From two per cent. to six per cent. of the amount of the claim was paid into court by the litigants to provide the lawyers' fees.

"Up to 1924 the majority of counsel and judges took bribes, but later, several were shot for corruption and since then cases of bribery have been very rare, but of course the court is apt to decide in favour of the Communist. Moreover its decisions can always be overruled by the Central Committee of the Party and this is almost certain to happen should the court happen to have given a verdict against a Communist.

"I got on all right till I pleaded with too much vehemence the cause of a friend whose cattle had been taken by a member of the Party. Then I was sent to prison without trial as an anti-Bolshevist."

"What was it like?" I asked.

"Not too bad, so far as food was concerned. I had tea with one small piece of sugar and black bread in the morning; a midday meal of bread and soup, with meat twice a week, and bread and tea again in the evening—much more than the people outside were getting. There are two sorts of prisons you know. The political ones are terrible, but the civil are so comfortable and well-run that people commit crimes in order to get into them.

"I was a 'political' of course, but I knew some of the guards so I got better treatment than most. For three months I was alone in a cell without speaking to anyone, but I had a bedstead on which I was allowed to use my own bedding, and a table. There was a library, but it consisted chiefly of propaganda. The worst thing was the paucity of light and air, for the very small window was almost entirely boarded up and I was only allowed out for twelve minutes' exercise at midnight."

"Why twelve minutes?" I asked.

"Because an hour's air was divided between five cells. That meant that the occupant of each got twelve minutes in the yard. At the end of the three months the G.P.U. took it into their heads to examine me, and after this I was put in a cell eighteen feet by fourteen feet and about nine feet high, with twenty other prisoners —there wasn't room to lie down. The air was foul and men fainted regularly when it got hot at midday. Fortunately some were taken out and shot. Then things were a bit better. After a second lengthy examination by the Commissars, I was let out with no more reason than had been given when I was arrested.

"For two years I worked as a casual labourer for something to eat, for, of course, I had no more chance of government employment, and I slept most of that time out of doors, generally in the station which is the warmest place in Erivan. Then I was re-arrested for stealing food from a co-operative shop. Oh, yes, I'd done it all right. It was mid-winter and I was starving. For this I was imprisoned during fifteen days. You see, things go the opposite way in Russia to what they

do anywhere else. Sometimes a murderer is only imprisoned for three months, but any political offender is lucky if he gets off with his life. Suspected spies are flogged and smugglers or dealers in illicit exchange are sent to Siberia for three years."

"How did you get away from Russia?" I asked.

"A man whom I'd once helped was arrested for anti-Bolshevism and he knew he was as good as dead, for he'd hidden in his house a friend concerned with the death of a Cheka agent, so he told me where he'd concealed a few roubles. With these I was able to pay one of the frontier guides who smuggle parties out of Russia, perhaps with the connivance of the Red guards."

He spoke as if all these were the simplest of happenings to be expected by anyone who lived under Soviet rule.

The Student

Alexis, aged twenty-three, was a large and naturally cheerful person, with the square face, square teeth and opaque brown eyes generally associated with Russians. His beard was growing. In fact it had reached the stage when it had ceased to be stubble. In spite of his youth, his shoulders were a trifle bent, but he moved with the lithe activity of an animal, and he was interested in everything.

"It was different," he kept on repeating. From where we sat in a white-washed cubicle in a village caravanserai, we could hear the Russian guns carrying on what appeared to be a continuous and comprehensive bombardment—if we mounted to the flat roof we could look across the frontier to where other mud-built, windowless houses stood on Russian soil—so I couldn't understand why anything should be "different."

"But it *is*," insisted Alexis. "Here one can breathe and one is certain of to-morrow." This indeed was optimism, for he had not a rouble or even a kopek in his pocket and he didn't know whither he was going, or how, or when.

GROUP OF RUSSIAN REFUGEES IN FRONT OF
A TEMPORARY SHELTER AT TABRIZ

GROUP OF RUSSIAN REFUGEES INCLUDING THE STUDENT
(IN WHITE BLOUSE) AND THE OUTLAW (IN FRONT)

"My people live in a village near Erivan," said Alexis. "They are very poor, so they have not been much troubled by the Bolsheviks. They have a tiny vineyard, which they cultivate themselves, but the grapes are sent to the government press in the town and they get so little money in return that there is only one pair of shoes in the house and whoever goes to Erivan wears it. My brother is twenty-five and a teacher in a technical school in Erivan. He earns eighty-seven roubles a month, and I lived with him while I was at the Armenian University which has one thousand three hundred students. I was studying scientific farming and village economics on a government grant of thirty-five roubles a month out of which five were taken in taxation.

"Each pupil has a food card, divided into squares, on which are written sugar, meat, vegetables, bread, groceries and so on, but there is never any meat available and everything else is so expensive that we had to live on three hundred grammes of black bread, which is the daily allowance and costs seven kopeks, eked out with one pound of vegetables at three or four kopeks and some weak tea which was made in a general samovar at the University and sold to the students for five kopeks a glass.

"The vegetables came from the only private shops in Erivan and they will be closed if the government succeeds in introducing collective farming. We were allowed four hundred grammes of sugar a month, and every six months one could get a ticket enabling one to buy a shirt. It cost about forty roubles at a co-operative shop and once a year one could buy a suit or a pair of trousers. The former cost sixty or seventy roubles and an ordinary cloth cap costs ten or eleven roubles. The teaching at the University was not bad—the science, I think, was probably good, but how should I know? We had five hours of lectures and classes every day, but sometimes it was all propaganda. The main teaching was the politics of Marx and Lenin, and we were kept up to date in the progress of revolution in every part of the world.

"No news was allowed from outside Russia and one couldn't work properly because one was always hungry. To get even the meagre allowance of black bread, one had to wait in a queue sometimes for five or six hours. There was no time for anything else."

The dark young man stretched himself and I noticed that the flesh under his nails and the palms of his hands was livid in contrast to the rest of his sunburned olive skin.

"It was a hopelessly constricted life," he said. "There was no freedom at all, and half of us were ill. During the last four years, forty-nine students managed to escape across the frontier. Of course, for the Communist it was much better. There were a hundred and thirty of them at the University and they got seventy roubles a month and double bread rations. The rooms where the ordinary students lodged were damp and dark, and eight or nine were squeezed into a space fifteen feet by twenty feet, but the Communists were never more than two or three in a room and they had electricity."

I asked him about the general conditions in Erivan, which is the capital of Russian Armenia.

"I suppose it has a population of ninety-six thousand," said Alexis, "but there are no particular industries. There is a cognac distillery and several factories where the cotton grown in the neighbourhood is cleaned and baled before being sent to the mills of Moscow and Leningrad. There are no churches open, except in the oldest of all Gregorian monasteries at Etchmiadzu, the seat of the Catholicus who is the head of the Armenian Church. Etchmiadzu is about sixteen kilometres from Erivan and though the monastery schools are shut and no novices are allowed, the church there is still used and sixteen monks remain in the building. There have been no services in Erivan since 1927 and about a dozen churches have been completely razed and Communist statues put in their places. Four or five mosques have been either ruined or closed and, though I personally think there must—surely—be something in it, nobody considers religion any more. It is finished.

"There are several cinemas in Erivan and the films are good, but they are largely propaganda, though we also got a number of European dramas and, in one place, all the best scientific and biological films. The government teaches hygiene, natural history and medicine by way of dramatic films which even the villagers can understand. There are some which illustrate childbirth in all its stages and others showing the inception, progress and treatment of diseases, which are probably very useful. The best seats at the cinemas cost one and a half roubles and the cheapest forty kopeks, but the instructional films are free. There are no taxis and no motors for hire. The carriages are very old, almost falling to pieces and they cost one and a half roubles from the station to the town, which is two kilometres. There are only two or three buses in the whole of Erivan and they run irregularly.

"Rooms are very scarce and difficult to find. A non-Communist has to pay twenty roubles a month for one small room and as no one can afford to do this with the average wage at thirty to forty roubles (a month), sometimes there are as many as twelve people in the same room. Cigarettes are comparatively cheap, twenty kopeks to one rouble for a packet of twenty-five, but soap is dear—it costs a rouble for a small, hard piece that will not lather properly."

"How did you get away?"

"It took me six months to save £2 Turkish and my brother gave me fifty roubles. All this I paid to a Persian who knew the secret methods by which quantities of fugitives get across the frontier. With him I went by train to Julfa. I wore a Communist hat and there was a woman with whom I talked and joked. Nobody took any notice of us. They thought, maybe, we were in love. We didn't go into the town of Julfa, but dropped off the train just outside and walked about eighteen kilometres into the country. It was night and at first the Persian couldn't find the crossing. We had to go along the Aras for a long way and we could see the fires at the posts and hear

privilege. During the two years of a conscript's service, he gets a good general education and returns home impressed with the position and activities of the government which has provided him with an excellent club, a cinema and a well-furnished canteen, with every form of instruction by lectures, films and gramophone records, with a special newspaper and an extensive library. As an ardent government partisan, he does unconscious propaganda in his village.

"In every civil club there is a military section, a rifle club and a first-aid society. Military subjects are taught in all the civil schools and the village population is much interested in this intensive militarization, especially in musketry and anti-gas defence."

"What about education?" I asked.

"There is a general improvement in all schools, but a shortage of qualified teachers forces the nine-year programme into a seven-year course. Pupils find it difficult to absorb all they are taught, but discipline is very strong and the tendency is to overwork.

"In the two or three universities I know about—I come from Kharkoff—the standard of education is high, the teaching excellent and the professors and teachers well paid, but penniless students are obliged to neglect their classes, or work half the night to earn their keep. Consequently, they develop consumption, or a variety of nervous diseases. I don't know much about science, but everywhere I hear it is making great strides. Some of my friends tell me, however, that much of it remains in theory, but there's no doubt the number of intelligentsia are increasing every year. I'm one of them, and," he laughed, "I dare say you're thinking it isn't doing me any particular good." Evading the point, I asked for further information about the general conditions in Russia.

"I could go on telling you about those for weeks and then not have finished," said the young man with the shrewd, clever face and lots of little wrinkles round very blue eyes. "Boots, clothes and every other necessity are only obtainable by ticket issued by a Co-operative

Society or a Trades' Union and then after much delay. Unregistered unemployed can sometimes obtain certain articles without a ticket by paying about double. The price of an ordinary suit in Kharkoff this year was two hundred roubles. Food-stuffs are expensive, scarce, and of very inferior quality.

"There is a general air of suspicion and nobody trusts anyone else. Everything is rather upside down, even in the big factories, for technical experts are often forced to obey the instructions of ignorant men who are higher up in the Party, and over all is the shadow of the G.P.U., so no one can work with any enthusiasm, for he doesn't know at what moment he will be suspected and dismissed. The Five Years' Plan should succeed on paper, but whether it'll be as productive as they hope, I don't know, because for the new factories which are being built, they often take the machinery out of old ones and for the new railways, steel bridges from less important lines.

"As I've said, nobody's given a free hand, so, in the end, even those who've started by being keenest, lose any desire to improve matters.

"The elections of course are a farce. At meetings of the Buro, it is the custom of the Party Cells to draw up lists of candidates, and at a general meeting of the Party, the President reads out the names and says: 'Comrades, who opposes the election of the persons mentioned on this list? Raise your hands.' Of course, nobody does.

"I don't think the Trades' Union, Club and Konsomal meetings are nearly so enthusiastically attended as they used to be, and awkward questions are often asked. In the workmen's restaurants and public houses, there are pretty acrimonious discussions, but they're generally drowned in vodka. I believe under the Tsars, the sale of vodka brought in an annual revenue of something like four hundred million roubles, but now it is increased to five hundred and sixty millions. (Oh, yes, we're all very good at figures in Russia to-day. Statistics have become an Art!)

"All the same, workmen do *not* want to return to the days of Tsarism. Some of the peasants do. The rest think they're gone so far on one road, they might as well see whether there's any good at the end of it."

At this point, my informant was joined by a friend, who had been a student at Leningrad University, and after trying in vain to escape by the guarded Northern frontier, had managed to get into Caucasia and thence across the river by the "usual" means. He had therefore seen a good deal of agricultural Russia, for he had been obliged to come the whole way on foot and it had taken him since the beginning of the year.

He announced that there must inevitably be a famine at the end of 1930, for the Kolhozy (Collective farms) had used up the winter-sown grain and were not sowing sufficient now to ensure a late summer crop. Too many horses had been slaughtered and the ignorant "poor" peasants to whom the government had entrusted the steam-tractors used on the Collective farms don't understand their machinery. "There are no mechanics in the villages capable of repairing the tractors after misuse," he said. "There's a terrific shortage of spare parts and the Russian peasant isn't yet educated up to the use of machinery. A fortnight's course on one of the big Collective farms doesn't give more than the first idea how to handle a tractor and I can tell you this right here, 'industrialization' is not going to produce food for the agricultural eighty-five per cent. of the population."

I left the two of them arguing lustily as to whether the export of manufactured goods was likely to prove more profitable to Russia than the development of her natural, agricultural resources. After five minutes they were leaning forward and both speaking at once.

The Secret Agent

Bahram, aged twenty-seven, was a Turkish Armenian from Batoum, and as he belonged to no party he had acted as agent for many unknown principals who wished to buy or sell contraband. Among these were several

important Communists. He was a cheerful and self-confident young man, respectably dressed in a Russian blouse and tweed trousers. His hair curled. His words tumbled over each other. He was very pleased with his own intelligence, and the way it had ministered to his escape.

"Smuggling began to be a big thing in 1925," he said, "and when the government got to know about it, contraband used to be confiscated in lots worth one or two million roubles. That's where I came in, for the government had to sell all this stuff, and having arranged an agent in each town I used to buy it with money provided by Commissars. I then resold the stuff secretly through my agents to the private shopkeepers, who still existed in those days, and shared the profit with the Commissars who'd put up the money.

"Up to 1927, I managed to go on with this sort of work, but I had to be more and more careful. In 1928, it became impossible and ever since then I've been trying to leave, but I couldn't get a visa.

"I'd made money, of course, and I had sent it out of the country. And early this year I managed to smuggle my mother and two brothers across the frontier on Persian passports, with which they had provided themselves several years ago. But I was too well known, and I didn't see how my escape was going to be managed.

"Then, last April, I heard I was going to be arrested, and just as I was trying to fix up the passport business with an official who had done several deals with me in the past, three Georgians from the Cheka came to my room to arrest me.

"I said, 'All right, we'll go along; but let's have a drink first.' And I gave them more vodka than they'd seen for a long time.

"Meanwhile, my friend hurried along to the local authorities, who had always been very obliging with passports for smugglers, and he got some papers made out in the name of a poor villager. By the time he returned the Cheka men were drunk and I could get

away. With the false papers I had no difficulty in travelling by train to Baku; but there I had to remain hidden for ten days, while I made cautious inquiries for one of the regular guides who take people across the frontier. Oh, yes, it's a business and a paying one —about the best we have in Russia now!

"I found a 'Turki'" (a Caucasian Moslem of Tartar or Turkish descent) "who agreed to get me into Persia for four hundred and fifty roubles. He made all the arrangements, and one night he told me I could start next day. So in his company and that of two women, who were in the same position as myself, we boarded a train for Yevlakh. Here a car was waiting, which took us to Shushi, and there we had to hide for two days in some ruined farm buildings without much food while the 'Turki' got horses.

"We rode at night and hid in the daytime—anywhere, behind bushes, in a disused well, in ditches—till we reached the Aras, which we crossed on those goatskins filled with air, that the shepherds use. A man swam beside each of us and guided us across the river, and after that it was all right."

I asked him if the bribery to which he had so gaily referred, as if it were a commonplace, was habitual in Russia, and he replied: "Not now. As far as I know the G.P.U. officials don't take bribes, but I used often to sell and buy goods for them. At the present moment it is very difficult to bribe anyone unless they know you intimately.

"Everyone is permanently frightened, and there is no freedom of thought, speech, or action, except among the younger Communists, who, knowing nothing of life outside Russia, are inspired by the idea that they are saving the world. I remember one of them saying to an Italian in my presence: 'What Mussolini wants to do for the good of your country, we mean to do for the whole world.' They have ideals all right, but the older generation, so far as my acquaintance goes, are pretty well disillusioned. They don't believe that they are doing any good."

The Middleman

His name was Hovargin, and he lived at Stavropol. He was a big man, with a skin burned to the colour of old walnut, and a hooked nose. His black cotton blouse was looped across protruding bones. His trousers were held together with patches, and he wore Turkish heelless slippers. Slumped on a cane chair, with an unlit cigarette between his fingers, he told me his story.

"From 1918 to 1922 things were all right if you knew the ropes. There was still money in the towns, and the smugglers did a thriving trade because the shops were empty. I knew all the contraband men, and I used to go out to meet them and buy the cloth and suits they had brought in from Turkey or Persia. I would barter these in the villages for food-stuffs, honey and wax. Prices were high, I can tell you. A blouse such as this," he indicated his own worn garment, "was worth two poods of honey" (one pood equals 80 lb.), "and in the towns I could get twenty roubles in gold, forty in silver, or two hundred in paper for each pood. There were several of us doing the same job, and we only sold to people we could trust.

"After 1922, when the New Policy was introduced" (the N.E.P. which allowed a certain amount of private trading), "I bought flour in large quantities in the Caucasus and sold it in the cities, but in 1924 they began to arrest the men who were supposed to be making money out of private business. Some of my friends were sent to Siberia, so I thought it was time to look for a new job.

"I came back to Stavropol and opened a small store in the name of my brother-in-law, who was a poor man and not likely to be taxed on what he hadn't got. We sold lemonade, sherbets and groceries, and made about two hundred roubles a month, but, after the expulsion of Trotsky in 1928, we had to close the shop or be taxed out of existence.

"I thought it best to be as unnoticeable as possible,

so I moved to Petigorsky, in the Northern Caucasus, and there I hired an orchard, one and a half 'dessiatines' in size. I made one thousand five hundred roubles that summer out of apples, apricots, and cherries, but the local authorities took away nine hundred in taxation. I was warned they had got their eyes on me, so off I went to the village of Dogoaz, near Gamarlu, where in April, 1929, I rented four flour mills. There wasn't too much grain in the neighbourhood, but what there was I ground, taking a tenth of the flour as my price. In this way I earned in nine months something like two hundred poods of wheat, but the government took half of this at one and a half roubles a pood, whereas the rest I could sell secretly at eight roubles the pood.

"Life was pretty hard in Dogoaz, but nobody dared say much.

"It seemed to me it was about time to clear out altogether, so on March 1st, this year, I got a Persian passport. Oh, yes, that's still possible. After the war Persian passports were at a premium. They were considered the safest of all Eastern ones, and the Consuls" (in the Near East), "who at that time were very ill-paid, made thousands of roubles by selling them to Russian and Turkish subjects who wanted to get away. There's much less done in that line nowadays but still it can be managed.

"Well, on March 7, I presented myself before the Commissar at Erivan, who took from me fifteen roubles for 'expenses,' and told me my passport would be stamped with an exit visa by March 20. On the 15th, without warning, I was arrested and taken to the Cheka prison in Erivan. For twenty-eight days I remained there without any examination at all, and then I was told that I should be tried on three charges: (*a*) For being an anti-collectivist; (*b*) for harbouring anti-Bolshevik sentiments; and (*c*) for trying to leave the country secretly.

"At that time" (March, 1930), "twelve hundred and fifty Armenians in the Caucasus had asked

the Persian Government for visas to proceed in a body to Iraq, where they hoped to find refuge among their fellow-Christians, and I was accused of originating the movement. There was no evidence at all against me, but I was kept in prison till June 6, and my wife was only allowed to come and see me once, when she told me in Assyrian" (Chaldean), "which none of the other prisoners spoke, that secret efforts were being made to influence the authorities on my behalf.

"On June 7 I was searched, and all my money, one American dollar and twenty roubles, was taken. Then I was put into a wagon and taken to the middle of Julfa bridge, where I was turned out and told I could cross the frontier.

"You want to know what it was like in the prison? Well, there were forty-eight of us in the same cell, and it was just big enough for us to lie down in two rows head to feet, but when we did this at night the floor was entirely covered and most people had somebody else's boots in their face. About six a.m. we each had a glass of tea with one small piece of sugar in it and a piece of black bread as large as your hand. At noon there was bean soup, and each man got a bowl of it with about fifteen pieces of bean floating in greasy water. That was all.

"We had nothing at night. The majority of us had no bedding and there was nothing to lie on but the cement floor. But those whose homes were near-by were allowed to have their own bedding after it had been nearly cut to pieces by a search-party.

"Each of us was given one cake of soap, which had to last three months, and there was no possibility of washing our clothes or our bodies. Twice a day, for fifteen minutes, we were taken out of the cell, and then we had to wash our hands and faces. Many died in my presence of diseases brought on by the filth, the bad air, and the lack of nourishment, and during the three months I was in prison I heard of sixty-one deaths in the building.

"There was no daylight in our cell, and we had one

electric-light bulb on which we depended day and night, for the two windows were almost entirely boarded up. There were just a few holes that you couldn't put your hand through, and consequently the atmosphere was so foul that even when we could buy a few cigarettes from one of the guards we could not smoke for long. The worst was when somebody got cholera or typhoid. . . .

"During the period of my imprisonment, fifty men, to my knowledge, were shot. We always knew when this was going to happen, for those condemned to death, with or without trial, were taken away at midnight and put into cars, which we could hear outside.

"Sometimes the condemned refused to get into the motors, and then they were shot at once. This happened to a man who was in the same cell, a great fighter, who'd been a leader of anti-Bolshevism in the village of Arzakand. His name was Arani Davidian, and he told the guards he wasn't going to oblige them by taking a motor-drive to his grave. They could bring the coffin to him; he wasn't taking any steps towards it. So they shot him there, on the spot, and we heard it. That was on March 25, this year (1930).

"Exiles for Siberia used to be taken away during the day and shut up in a special cell, from where, between ten and eleven at night, they would be removed with an armed guard and taken in 'blind' trucks to the station. There were between one thousand five hundred and one thousand six hundred prisoners, all politicals. The number varied, of course, and among them, owing to dissensions in the party, were many Communists and several Red Army officers. Their number increased every week, and it was one of them, a G.P.U. man, who told me that nine thousand exiles from Armenia had been sent to Siberia or to forced labour in the timber districts round Archangel. The same man said that altogether during the Soviet régime eleven million prisoners and exiles had been registered in the G.P.U. books."

CHAPTER XXI

RUSSIAN TALES CONTINUED: THE TEACHER, THE SEAMSTRESS AND THE SCHOOLGIRL, THE OUTLAW, AND THE TAILOR WHO BECAME A BANDIT

The Teacher

AMALIA was twenty-two, and she came from Krasnatar, in the Province of Kuban,* where she was a teacher in a government primary school, earning fifty-five roubles a month. At night she taught classes of workmen from the neighbouring factories and thus increased her salary by another forty roubles. The men were Armenians and entirely illiterate. She taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, the government providing pens, papers, a room, and all other necessities, and the men being obliged to attend for a minimum of twelve hours a week.

"Did they like it?" I asked.

"Not at all," replied Amalia. "They were tired and they earned very little, and everything was very difficult, and they used to grumble all the time at having to work an extra four hours for three nights a week in order to learn to read. They were only earning fifty to sixty roubles a month, while members of the Party doing the same work in the same factory got nearly double the wages. Krasnatar is a fairly big town, with a population of perhaps fifty or sixty thousand, and the province used to be famous for its grain, but there is little enough doing there now."

Amalia shrugged her well-shaped shoulders. She was a big girl, somewhat heavily built, with dark hair, brushed back from the forehead; a pale, rather intense face, and a manner at once contemptuous and forlorn.

"Before the war my father was in business and quite

* Or Ghapan.

well off. He lost all his money when the Bolsheviks put an end to private trading, so, in association with two friends, one Armenian and one Russian, he rented six steam-mills, but they were promptly confiscated. However, at that time, there was no one else who understood the machinery, so the owners were allowed to work the mills periodically.

"Mother, and an aunt who lived with us, used to do a little sewing for private people, but it was irregular and badly paid and, of course, it had to be done in secret, for since 1929 everything had to be bought at the government co-operatives, which contained nothing at all! Whatever they" (the government) "had to sell they sent to Persia, and there was nothing left for Russia. You were lucky if you could get any cloth at all, and even then it was twenty-five roubles a metre. Cloth simply does not exist, and shoes cost forty roubles a pair, and their soles may or may not be made of paper.

"Of course, the people in the Party got all they wanted. Before the goods ever appeared in the government shops at all, members of the Party had a chance of buying them.

"Teaching is a dangerous profession because it is so much watched. Most of the older teachers are not of the Party; therefore they are constantly suspected. In many schools there are no Communist teachers at all, but the younger ones now are mostly Karl Marxites, and, of course, whether you are or you aren't, you've got to teach propagandist politics instead of geography.

"Half the children don't know where Paris is, but most of them have a very good conception of the meaning of a revolutionary call. What they don't learn at school they get on the wireless. Have you ever listened to the Russian broadcast? There's just enough music to keep one hoping, but the rest is all about the progress of revolution in China or India; the anti-God front, and have you joined the Bezbozknik yet? with lists of churches voluntarily closed, and so on; or else it's about industrial production—such and

such a factory has beaten the record and turned out during the last week more rails, or something, than was estimated in the Five Years' Plan. Well done, so-and-so!"

Smooth shoulders were shrugged almost out of a shabby print frock.

"Officially, I left my family when I was fifteen. I had to, or I should not have got a job, for they were of the very small bourgeoisie, voteless, of course, and without the privilege of a bread-ticket. I worked in a jam factory, and having joined the union I was able to attend a government night-school. I only earned twenty roubles a month, and I couldn't have existed on that; but father and mother got divorced in order that she should be entitled to employment. No wife of a private worker can get a job anywhere; but, as soon as she was free, mother was taken on in a government tailoring place, and, as she and I then were both entitled to bread-cards, the three of us could live.

"Food was terribly scarce. Only one small glass of milk is allowed for each child and there was not nearly enough to go round. If you wanted to be sure of getting some, you had to be outside the government shop by two a.m. and wait for a couple of hours in a queue. If you were later than three or four a.m. sugar and flour had run out as well as milk. Three eggs a week was the allowance for each family, and nine-tenths of a pound of sugar.

"If you were lucky you got a little under one pound of meat every other day for the whole family, whatever its size. People used to complain because one person living alone and one family each had a card, and both got the same amount.

"No, of course, people don't marry under such circumstances—what's the use of it?—but sometimes they get a civil certificate. Half of them live together without any registration at all, and anyway it doesn't much matter, because it's a miracle if a couple are still together at the end of a year."

I asked about the so-called persecution of religion.

"There isn't any," she said, "at least, not that I

saw. It is just that the churches are closed, and nobody thinks about religion any more. The peasants go on believing in a numb sort of way, but the townsfolk don't, and the young people are much too busy with the difficulties of this life to bother about another one."

"Why did you give up your job as a teacher?" I asked, after I had learned how Amalia educated herself to a sufficiently high standard in the intervals of making jam in order to qualify as a teacher in a kindergarten by the time she was eighteen. From this she had been promoted after a year to the primary school, wherein education for boys and girls was compulsory for four years.

"Because, during the holidays, the teachers are all sent to different villages to make propaganda and to report on the conditions in which the peasants are living, who are Kulaks, who are anti-Bolsheviks, and so on. I refused to do this, and, of course, I lost my post and my food-card together.

"Then I made up my mind I must leave the country, so I joined up with a band of twenty-five others, men, women and children, and we came by train through Baku to Sahad Jani. We had no tickets and no papers, but nobody asked us any questions, for we had all paid something for the services of a conductor whose job it was to smuggle people out of Russia. He arranged everything. He must have bribed the ticket collector and lots of other officials, I should think, for the train conveniently slowed just outside a village station, and we all tumbled out, and there were a couple of wagons waiting near a shed.

"In these we drove for four nights, hiding in the daytime wherever there was any cover. The conductor, who belonged to a regular organization, had told us that we could get food in the villages through which we passed, but though the people were most friendly and always willing to help us, they had not got enough for themselves, so we were all pretty hungry by the time we arrived within fifty kilometres of the frontier, and were told we must leave the wagons.

"It was then about midnight, and hoping to reach

the frontier before daylight, we ran most of the night. Some of the women were ill through lack of food, and two of the children were unconscious, but we hurried them along somehow. Of course, when the sun rose, we were nowhere near the frontier, and all that day we had to hide in an old water-channel, which was quite dry. We had nothing to eat or drink, and one woman went off her head. We had to stuff something into her mouth to stop her screaming, for there was a post quite near. We could see the soldiers moving about, and we were desperately frightened."

Amalia screwed up her eyes and shivered. "Oh, that was a day to be sick in thinking about, but at last, about nine o'clock, the conductor came back to us and told us that we must try and cross the frontier at once —for the soldiers were playing cards. So we all crept out—it was horribly exciting, for we knew the soldiers had fierce dogs—and presently, after we'd walked, and sometimes crawled if there was no cover, a long way, the conductor told us we were safe. He took us to a house belonging to a friend, which he said was in Persia, and we had some tea.

"Later some Persian soldiers came and asked us questions, and they said: 'Don't go outside or you might be seen by the Russians.' It is Persian politics to be nice to us. I don't know why."

"How much did you pay your conductor?" I asked, and the young woman smiled so broadly that she became quite human and approachable, instead of a dim sort of figure in a story.

"I only had two hundred roubles, so I couldn't pay more than that," she explained. "All my family had contributed, but we could not raise any more. There were fifteen Jews with our party, and two of them were rich. They paid two thousand roubles each and the others about five hundred. There were six children with us, aged three, six, eight, nine and so on. We thought one was going to die, because for three days we had practically no food and only a little very bad water, but it didn't.

"From the frontier," she concluded, "we were brought up to Ardabil in wagons. It took three days, and since then we've been kept here in the police-station, but I don't mind. I've nowhere to go. I don't know one single person in Persia. What can I do?"

The Seamstress and the Schoolgirl

I found them sitting together in a corner of the yard where refugees were herded before being examined by the police. They were in no way related. They came from different cities, and had never heard of each other until they found themselves the only women in a party of seventeen fugitives personally conducted over the frontier by the amazing organization which seems to exist for this sole purpose. They never spoke to each other during the hours I was with them. But they had nowhere to go, and perhaps they felt a certain comfort in each other's presence.

The older woman was monosyllabic, and it was with great difficulty that I drew from her a few sentences describing her life at Elizabetopol. Her name was Zara, and she said she was forty-two. She looked fifteen years older.

"Ten years ago I used to earn thirty or forty roubles a month with my sewing, and that was plenty to live on. Lately, I earned the same amount doing piece-work in a government shop, but it wouldn't buy anything at all. We had an eight hours' day, and no overtime was allowed. We worked in a crowded room without heat and without sufficient light. My father and brother were shoemakers and my two sons were blacksmiths, so I thought we had nothing to fear. I had one girl at school, and all four of us shared a single room—my daughter died of typhoid."

Zara had a small face shrivelled like the skin of a medlar. She was entirely nondescript. There was nothing you could possibly notice about her. She wore a faded worsted shawl over her head and a black

cotton garment that had faded to an uncertain greenish tint. Her hair was grey. I never saw her smile.

In an almost inaudible voice, she continued her story: "She was terribly ill, and we couldn't get any milk. All we had was black bread. The Bolsheviks got double the amount. Sometimes the government shops sold at double rates to those who had no food-cards. I stood all night in a queue to get a little milk, which is only issued to children at government institutions, but I couldn't get any. Sometimes a little contraband comes in from Persia or Turkey, but that's piece-goods or clothing." Another pause. I thought her mind was wandering, but she went on: "There was only one bed. My sons had no work. Their forge was a private one and had been taken by the government. Why should people bother about shoeing their horses nowadays? No, there was no work.

"I tried to get the priest, but he wouldn't come. You see, Party Members and the parents of children at government schools are forbidden to go to church."

"Why wouldn't the priest come?"

"He thought he'd bring trouble on us and I'd lose my sewing, which was all we had to live on. So she died, and there was nothing I could do."

Six months afterwards, her sons helped to defend a village in which they were staying with some relatives against G.P.U. troops sent to enforce collectivization. One of them was wounded, captured and sent to prison, where, so far as his family is concerned, he disappeared. The other went to the mountains. The mother was smuggled across the Plain of Moughan because her cobbler brother managed to save the requisite amount of roubles, but she went like a parcel, uncaring, unnoticing, and I don't think she knew where she was, or what was going to happen to her.

Sirvard, who sat beside her in a square, uncompromising sort of way, was solid and pale, with nice, white teeth and a gentle voice. She was sixteen and she came from Leninakan (late Alexandropol). "I ran away from school," she said.

"Why?"

Sirvard meditated. Speech was not easy for her, but this was the gist of her story which took a long time to extract. "I lived with two distant cousins because my parents were killed early in the Revolution"; but I think by this term she meant the recent Caucasian revolt. "We had only one room and there wasn't enough to eat, because we had two food-cards for the three of us. One of my cousins was a smuggler. He used to go and meet the contraband men who brought gold, shoes, cotton, wool and silk across the Persian and Turkish frontiers. He bought all these things from the Moslems who knew the secret ways of getting them into Russia and he sold them privately —at night—in the town. In a good month he made as much as eighty or ninety roubles, but the other cousin couldn't get any work at all, for he had once been in prison as an anti-Bolshevik. Really, he had no politics at all, but in March last year" (1929) "there was a campaign against all who were suspected of sympathizing with the Armenian Nationalist Party, and Vartar was imprisoned for five months. At the same time all the girls who were not the children of Party Members were expelled from school and I lost most of my friends.

"This year things were worse. We lived on black bread and cheese, with smuggled tea and only three hundred grammes of sugar a month for all of us. One week there was no tea to be had in the shops and the school only gave it to the children of the 'very poor,' the lowest class of all. Then we heard that my cousin was suspected and we left Leninakan immediately within an hour of getting the news. We had no luggage, so it was not difficult. We walked all the way to the frontier, hiding in the daytime and moving on at night, but we didn't go the nearest way, for my cousin—the one who was a smuggler—knew the contrabandiers who worked near Etchmiadzu. But when we got there, there was a great deal of fighting and the frontier was well guarded. That was in April or late in March, I forget which. So we went right

through the country, keeping to the mountains or hiding among the ruins, where houses had been burned, and then beyond the river, where there is flat country (the Plain of Moughan), we met a Turk who was a friend of my cousin's and we gave him seventy-five roubles for the three of us and he promised to bring us safely into Persia.

"There was a whole party, hidden in a Moslem village—that's where I met her——" She did not turn her head to look at the woman beside her. "But when it was dark, on the night we were going to start just as we were all ready, firing was heard not very far off. There were four rifles in the house and my cousins took two of them and went out with two other men. None of them came back. We don't know what happened because there wasn't any noise. We waited all that night and the next day. Then we had to start, because the women in the house were frightened. They had children and they said they would all be killed if we were found under their roof. So we went off, first for a long way, all one night, on foot. Then there were some donkeys and we rode on these with bales of grass as if we were peasants, but we saw no one and I didn't know we had come into Persia till the guide left us."

The Outlaw

Nerses was a Russian Armenian from Novruzhu in the district of Ghapan. His sun-burned face was hairless and his head shaved so that it looked like a greyish billiard ball. He had a long narrow face, pinched above the jaw, and his eyes were a tired, washed-out blue. He had no shoes, having bartered them that morning for some food. His trousers were patched and his coat buttoned across a bare chest.

"Up to 1927 I used to make my own wine," he told me. "I had a small vineyard, in which I employed three peasants. Gradually my taxation was increased from a hundred roubles a year to fifteen hundred and

then, last January, it was again raised, this time to two thousand roubles. I hadn't any money to pay, for I could only sell my wine to the government at starvation prices, so I said it was impossible, and at once the Cheka came and confiscated all my cattle, my press, my bottles and everything else of any value.

"In February, the whole village was obliged to join the government Collective farm. Five per cent. did so willingly, because they believed they would learn new things about agriculture, but the remainder only did so out of fear.

"On March 5th, the Cheka made a round of all the villages with orders to collect every child between the ages of one and six, so that they might be taken away to government institutions and educated as Communists. But the mothers would not let them go. At first they fought the soldiers with their hands, and several were killed or wounded, and many I know hanged themselves, for they said it was no use living without their children. Others hid their babies in the forest, or took them into the mountains, and the most resolute formed themselves into a band and told the Cheka soldiers: 'Either you must kill us, or you can't have our children.' The clamour of the women put an end to this wholesale kidnapping, before Stalin's order came out and that order didn't do much good to Armenia. It was too late.

"For in January, when the Cheka confiscated my possessions, they rounded up all the suspected Kulaks and herded them into Erivan like cattle. It was bitterly cold and the town was knee-deep in snow. There is a big square where the old Russian Cathedral used to stand. That was levelled to the ground and a statue of the Communist, Shahsomian, who was killed in Baku in 1919, put in its place. Here, in this square, without any shelter at all and no food but what the townsfolk dared to bring secretly at night, all the Kulaks were left day after day in the snow until, in groups, they could be packed into cattle-trucks and sent off to the Northern provinces.

"I'd been warned when they took my cattle that I should be arrested within a few days, so I didn't wait to be hunted out of my farm like a rat. With eleven others, I went off into the hills and remained in hiding there, while all these things that I've been telling you happened in the district.

"But a relative of mine, a woman who was going to have a baby, was among the peasants exposed in the square at Erivan and when, with the rest, she was herded into a truck, she had no room even to sit down. When the train reached the station of Sardarabad, the men in the truck appealed to the soldiers, for they said the woman would die. The soldiers took her part and were very angry with the armed Cheka guards who would do nothing to help, though the child was actually being born.

"There was trouble, and some other soldiers joined in. Shots were fired and the train had to leave quickly. The result of this was that in the last week of January four thousand soldiers were removed to the interior.

"Meanwhile, our little party remained in the forests and mountains until we found a Moslem guide who was willing to take us across the frontier. My own village was less than two kilometres from the Aras river but there was a military post in the neighbourhood, so we went a long way round and tried to cross where it was very deep and the current too strong. The ice was breaking, for it was the end of February, but the river was dangerous, being full of jagged floes. We were all armed and we strapped our rifles on our heads and began to swim, but half-way across, we found we were only nine and as we had heard shooting four went back to see what had happened. The current swept us below where we had entered the river, and wet through and half frozen, we crawled back along the bank for our friends.

"We came upon them suddenly with half a dozen soldiers, who had arrested them while they hesitated to throw themselves into the Aras. There was a fight and two soldiers were killed We got one of

our men back and then more guards came up and we had to be off to the mountains again.

"This time we were declared outlaws. A price was put on our heads and any villager had the right to shoot us at sight. Instead of which they brought us food and we hid among the rocks for weeks, living on whatever we could get from friendly villagers. Gradually our numbers increased from five to over a hundred and when there were enough of us we got a fair amount to eat, for we raided the government Co-operative shops, or the depots where the Soviet grain is kept. The villagers used to send us information when trucks of provisions had come in and we'd attack them before they could be unloaded. Troops were sent against us, but we joined up with more than a thousand dispossessed peasants who had fortified the pass of Djegin, and without much difficulty we repulsed a number of attacks. The Red Army is not very anxious to do this work, but they are forced into it by the Cheka groups who go everywhere with the soldiers.

"Three soldiers deserted and joined us and from them we heard we'd killed about sixty, and that asphyxiating gas was to be used against us. We heard also that the country was revolting all along the frontier and that we should have no difficulty in crossing the river. This was not true, of course, for the fighting is only in certain places and the guards along the Aras have been doubled, but with a band of nearly a hundred I started back for Ghapan.

"Fighting our way, we came at last to the river. We were warned that the Bolsheviks had guns hidden in many places, but we daren't turn back, for the troops were behind us, so we went into the water at night, hoping to be able to swim across, two or three at a time. But the guards saw us and there was much firing and our people lost their heads and all threw themselves into the river at once. Then I heard the plop-pop-popp of Maxims and I thought we were all dead. The river became like a butcher's shop. Only fourteen of us got across and five of those were wounded.

The Tailor who Became a Bandit

Bagrad was twenty-three and he came from the village of Vachagan, where his father was a peasant owning seven dessiatines of arable land. There were six sons in the family. Two worked in the government copper-mines at Hankir and the three smallest were at school in the same town. All six lived together in the same room, except in summer when the school was shut and the younger trio were sent back to Vachagan to work on the fields. Bagrad was a tailor by profession, earning one rouble thirty-four kopeks a day in a government Co-operative shop. "But on October 24, 1929, my work came to an end," he explained, sweeping back a mop of straight black hair which continually fell over his eyes. "At one and the same time, I was thrown out of my tailoring and my small brothers expelled from school because father was listed as a Kulak. However, I was pretty well known in Hankir—in fact for a couple of years, I'd been running a sideline which was more profitable than the tailoring, smuggled grain, you understand. I could sell it secretly in the towns for double and treble what I had to pay the contrabandiers for it. Some of the clients who bought wheat from me asked if I would make up suits for them if they provided the cloth. I gladly agreed and for four months I used to work every night when I could be safe from interruption. I made about fifteen roubles a week, with luck, for I only charged eight for tailoring a suit and the government shop charged twenty-five.

"On February 24, this business also was ended, for without any warning at all, four of the Cheka appeared in my room and said I must go with them. Only one was armed and he happened to be a relation, but he made no sign and I thought he would do nothing for me.

"On the way to the prison, two others were arrested and then, as we were passing along the river bank, the guard who was my relative signalled to me quickly

and I threw myself into the water. He waited for some moments before firing and did not give the order to pursue me in a boat till I was out of reach.

"On the other side of the river was a factory in which my uncle was a mechanic. I managed to reach him without being seen, and he hid me in a cellar where there was a good deal of scrap iron and waste material. But this kindness of his was afterwards discovered and he was put in prison. At night, my uncle helped me to leave the factory and gave me a little money. I went to a Turkish" (local Moslem) "village called Baidagh and took refuge in the house of a friend to whom I had often sold contraband. Next morning, dressed as a Turk in wide, heelless shoes, felt leggings, an enormous sheepskin hat, woollen trousers very baggy round the hips and a blue blouse belted with metres of white sash, I went off to arrange my escape.

"I walked twenty-five kilometres to another Turkish village, where I had a friend who was also a tailor. Just as I reached his house, pretending, because there were strangers present, that I wanted to order some trousers, I saw a Cheka officer and four soldiers descending from their horses. So I had to hide in the oven, which is a great hole sunk in the earth, while the Turks swore that, though I had passed through the village, I had left three hours ago in the direction of Hankir.

"It was pretty stifling in the oven, though the women threw water on the fire to extinguish it, and I was glad to be able to get out." When Bagrad smiled he looked like a schoolboy, for he was small and slight with an unfinished air about his mouth and forehead.

"After that," he said; "I wandered from one Turkish village to another for sixteen days with the Cheka at my heels and then I joined a band of twenty-four which operated from Mount Khoosdub.

"We used to raid the Communist stores and the smaller military posts whenever we got a chance and once we tried to blow up an armoured train, but we

hadn't enough explosive. At intervals troops used to be sent against us, but the mountains were kind to us. In their gorges half a dozen men could hold up a battalion.

"On March 18th, just after I'd joined, we had a pretty desperate fight with two hundred and fifty of the Red Army who'd surrounded us on three sides. That lasted for about seventy-two hours and then the soldiers retreated, leaving a machine-gun and thirty-seven dead, but we—up behind the rocks, where they could only see the flash of our rifles—lost only one man killed. A month later, the band had increased to two hundred and on the 28th—I think it was—four hundred soldiers were sent against us.

"This time we had considerable casualties and they lost four machine-guns. The mountain was surrounded and we wondered if our ammunition would hold out, for the neighbouring posts had recently been strengthened, and it was a difficult matter replenishing our supplies, but at last the soldiers left and we could look around us and wonder how long this life would last. Personally——" he screwed his face into a series of whimsical twists, "I'm better with a needle than a rifle. I don't like noise and I'm frightened of being hurt! You see, since I was quite small, I've been interested in tailoring and the life of a mountaineer is only suited to a goat. I am not of that breed, so I decided to leave and I went off one night to the nearest Turkish village, where I hid for a time. By this time, my hair and my beard had grown. In fact I was all hair and no one could possibly recognize me in my sheepskin hat and my leather coat. I went back to Vachagan at night, because I wanted to see my father, but when I got there I found he had been arrested and sent to prison somewhere in the North and all my brothers had disappeared. The house was empty and the land part of a Collective farm. It seems that about the time I was making my escape from Hankir—late in February" (1930), "that was—all the villagers had been ordered to join the Kulhoz and the priest, whose name

was Sarkis and who owned five fine cows, feared for his life, so he offered to join it, too. The Cheka told him: 'Before you can become a member, you must publicly renounce your religion, pour kerosene on your vestments and burn them in public. Then you must publish an account of your renunciation in the local paper together with an exhortation to other priests to follow your example.' The Father consulted many of his parishioners and they, fearing for his life, told him: 'You must do as they say. It is your only chance.' So he renounced his religion, burned his vestments and made the required announcement in the paper, after which he went to the Cheka in Hankir with the newspaper paragraph in his hand, and asked once more to enter the Kulhoz. But they tore it up and laughed at him and said: 'Surely you didn't believe such a promise.' They took away all he possessed and he was very frightened, for the priest of Marra village had been arrested and sent no one knew where. One night he and his two elder sons were walking along a road and some Cheka guards came up with them and would not even let them tell the villagers of their arrest. The young men were sent to Siberia but the priest disappeared. A few days later, the third son, a boy of twelve, was secretly arrested and but that some villagers happened to see him being taken away, his mother would never have known what had happened to him.

"When I heard all this, I delayed no longer, but passing from one Moslem village to another, I reached the Aras without adventure. Altogether I paid ten gold roubles, four hundred paper ones, a pair of trousers and a blouse to the various Turks who helped me, but to the last one who swam across the river with me, I had nothing to give. He said it was a good deed and Allah would reward him, but I'm afraid it is more likely the payment will be from the Soviet."

Note. The Armenians refer to all Moslem Caucasians as Turks, but they are of Tartar origin and only remotely connected with the Osmanli Turks of the old Ottoman Empire and the new Anatolian Republic.

The Kulhoz is a Soviet Collective farm.

CHAPTER XXII

NESTORIANS FROM RUSSIA IN URMEYA

IF the majority of Caucasian refugees seek shelter in Tabriz, or among the peaks of Kara Dagh with the Shahsevand tribe, according to whether they are Christian or Moslem, the Nestorians, who proved themselves excellent fighters during the Great War and subsequently capable farmers and industrialists, go further south.

What Palestine is to the Jews, the plain of Urmeya is to the Nestorian Christians. These sturdy peasant-folk have had as troubled a history as any in Central Asia. They are the lineal descendants of the sect founded by Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople who was excommunicated and banished by the Third General Council of the Church at Ephesus in A.D. 431. They took refuge in Persia, where they are said to have converted the famous Prester John to their heretical doctrine concerning the dual nature and person of Christ. At one time they had twenty-five Bishoprics between the Mediterranean and the coast of China, but Tamerlane decimated them and drove them into the Kurdish mountains, where, near Julamerk, those few who have not been exiled or massacred remain an isolated and alien Christian unit surrounded by a nationalism more dangerous than Islam. Their Patriarch, the Mar Shimun, who now lives at Mosul, is chosen from a special family, a number of whose members are set aside at birth and may not either marry or eat meat until one of them is appointed to the leadership of the Church.

Before the war, there were some fifty thousand Nestorians in the plain of Urmeya, cultivating the best vineyards in Persia, and exporting a quantity of raisins,

but this fertile province was the Flanders of Central Asia. Russians and British, Turks, Kurds and Persians fought across it, and in 1915, when the Cossack army temporarily withdrew, ten or twelve thousand Nestorians followed it into Russia and settled in many different districts from Moscow to the Don.

Thereafter an Assyrian (Nestorian) army was formed to defend the Western frontier of Azerbaijan against Kurds and Turks, and when the Russians retreated for the second time in 1917, it was the sole defence of Urmeya against the Moslem Mountaineers led by the notorious Simko and against the Persians bent on plunder.

By 1918, in spite of the heroic actions fought by the Assyrian army, vastly outnumbered and cut off from the British forces operating towards Hamadan, Christians from the plain of Selmas were gradually forced down to Urmeya, and in the summer of that year began the terrible exodus towards Iraq of eighty-five thousand Armenians and Nestorians to end in the camps of Baqubah on the Diyala and Mindan on the Lesser Zab. It is said that a third of the fugitives perished on the way. At the present moment there are probably not more than ten thousand Nestorians left in the half-deserted villages of Urmeya, where most of the houses are still in ruins, but their numbers are being augmented by a new retreat.

Daily, along the road from Russia, come the heavy wagons of these unfortunate people doomed apparently to be fugitives from every corner of the earth. The majority of their possessions have been left behind. There is no work for them in Azerbaijan, but they still look upon Urmeya as a land of promise and feel that things must go better as soon as they can put their feet under a "Kyursee"—a low table covered with a carpet, over a hole in which is a pot of charcoal—in their native province.

I talked with many of those who had crossed the Russian frontier within the last month and heard that the policy of the Soviet Government had been to tax

those who had any private business to such an extent that they were obliged to close it.

A couple just arrived from Rostov told me that the average worker there earned thirty roubles a month and the price of a room varied between twenty and fifty. "I had a small grocery shop," said the man, "but during the last two years, my taxes were increased until I had to pay more than I could possibly earn. Life was very unhappy, because there was no enjoyment of any kind. Workers could get three-quarters of a pound of bread a day and one quarter of a pound of meat, which was often bad, on a ticket. Non-workers paid thirty-five kopeks a pound for black bread and seventy kopeks a pound for meat, but it was an offence punishable by imprisonment for them to have meat in their possession. When a ticket is issued for a new suit, or a dress, the amount of stuff allowed is generally six yards, but you can't choose the colour or the material. You may find yourself with cotton in midwinter and wool in summer according to what happens to be in the government shop.

Neither parents nor teachers may punish the children, who can go and complain to the police if corrected in any way. Consequently, there is no discipline in what passes for the home, and though education, in theory, is first class in the schools, the noise is so great that you can't hear yourself speak and no child works if it doesn't want to. It is forbidden to mention the name of God to one's own child and my little daughter was taught to pray to Lenin as the deity from whom all good would come. That was too much, and as it happened that my neighbour, who was an engineer, shot himself in the next room because the Cheka had confiscated all his possessions—for no one, not even a Communist, is allowed to own more than is essential for the most primitive needs—we decided to leave. We Assyrians are Persian subjects with Persian passports, so all we had to do was to get a visa which costs from fifteen to twenty roubles, but many of us cannot leave Russia on account of unpaid taxes, and when I

crossed the frontier, I was not allowed to bring anything at all. My wife and I were stripped to the skin and examined as if we were prisoners. They made my wife take down her hair; they pulled the soles off our shoes and split the seams of our clothing to discover if we had hidden any money."

A Nestorian who had been a farmer near Almaver took up the tale. "Though the land was my own, bought with the money I had brought into Russia in 1915, I was only allowed to keep one pood of grain per month for each member of my family and when they found we could live on that without starving, the allowance was reduced to half a pood. The government made a list of all my animals and implements and told me I must only use them to work the land. They counted my hens and made calculation as to how many eggs they would lay. All these were taken, together with all the butter and milk, and there was much trouble if the amount were insufficient. At last they said I was not producing enough and henceforth everything belonged to the government and would be worked by them. But I really left the country because I was afraid of what would happen to my children. Last Easter there was an anti-religious procession in Almaver and the schoolchildren were encouraged to run after the figure of Christ mounted backwards on a donkey and jeer at the mock Apostles who followed Him. So I applied for a visa and by leaving all my furniture behind, I was able to get out of the country."

It was always the same story. These ardent Christians, who for fifteen hundred years, had held their faith inviolate against the assault of Arab, Kurd and Turk, Tartar and Mongol and Persian, were afraid that their children would be brought up as atheists. So they piled themselves into their large-wheeled wagons and came down to the frontier where they were invariably despoiled of the savings with which they had hoped eventually to return and rebuild their villages in Urmeya.

A couple who had come from Moscow told me that they regretted Russia. "The agricultural possibilities

are incalculable," said the man. "Any good farmer can make far more than a competence. It is folly to waste the land and its products as the Soviet are doing. Persia has nothing to compare with the natural wealth of Russia. It could be heaven on earth so far as the farmer is concerned, if only he were left alone, but he is driven out of his mind by the exactions of the government and when he has nothing left, he kills himself, for the Russian is moody by nature and when the blood goes to his head, he does not wait to think. I had a friend who was a farmer. The government had taken everything he possessed and when there was nothing left but a little grain for the winter, they came to him and demanded thirty poods. He said: 'Wait until I have time to collect it,' and when they had gone he went into his barn where there were only five poods, the last of his store, and there he hanged his wife and his three children and himself at the end of the row."

This was the only tale of violence told me by one who had actually known the victims. Rumours were repeated and magnified, but on the whole the Assyrians' stories were that, if they were shopkeepers or men of business, they were taxed out of existence and when at last they could not pay, they were imprisoned and their possessions confiscated. When permits were granted to them to cross the frontier, it was marked on their papers what they might take with them, sometimes a wagon and a horse, sometimes pots, pans, a bed and a few pieces of furniture, sometimes so many articles of clothing and in a few cases sums of paper money varying from twenty to fifty roubles.

A woman whose husband had been a pedlar in Moscow told me: "The factory wages in the capital run from fifty to a hundred roubles a month, but my husband did not make more than forty to fifty a month shining shoes when it was fine, or mending goloshes and selling bootlaces and rubber heel-caps in the streets. We got bread regularly on a food-ticket and meat two or three times a month. We lived

with another Assyrian family in two rooms. There were eight of us altogether and it was rather cold in winter for charcoal cost a rouble a pood. At first our life was quite good and we could get along comfortably, but two years ago things began to get worse. My son who was nine years old, was at school and the teachers used to say to him: 'You won't get bread unless you deny there is a God.' And this year my husband was told he could not work any more for himself. He must work for the government and out of all he made he must only keep ten kopeks from every rouble. The rest must go to the government. So we paid two roubles for a permit to leave the country and we gave all our savings to a Moslem who charged us eighty roubles for smuggling them across the Aras. He hid them under a stone in a certain place of which he had told us and we found them there when we crossed the river."

Another woman, with bare legs, a torn cotton frock, and a yellow handkerchief wound over her plaits, said that her husband had been a shoeblack and a pedlar in Khiva, but that he was nearly always sick, so he couldn't earn more than thirty roubles a month. "The government was kind to us," she said, "because we were poor. We only paid five roubles a month for two rooms which we and our three children shared with my husband's brother and his wife. The house had been confiscated from a man who owned a private business, and after we left, the same rooms were let to a Russian for fifteen roubles a month. The doctor said my husband must have good food, but we could only get black bread, and last winter not even enough of that. In February my husband was forbidden to go on with his work and told he must find government employment. After a while he was offered a job as a waiter in a government restaurant at sixty roubles a month, but prices were rising every day. Canvas shoes cost six roubles a pair at the government stores and eight outside. Cotton stuff was fifty kopeks a yard and woollen stockings ten roubles a pair. We were afraid for the children. A

friend had scolded her boy because he hurt his sister and he went out and complained to the police, saying his mother had beaten him and they came at once and took the woman to prison with the baby she was feeding. When the father came home he found his son in tears saying: 'I didn't know what I was doing.' He shot him and then shot himself, because he said anything was better than being forced to bring up savages and if one couldn't even correct one's own children, one might as well be dead. No, we had no difficulty in leaving. We were allowed to bring away our clothes and our few bits of furniture, but we had nothing of any value except a hundred and twenty roubles which they took from us at the frontier."

A couple from Vladekavkaz explained that up to 1928 they were quite well off. The man earned eighty to a hundred roubles a month by carting petrol for the government. He had a horse and wagon and rented from the local authorities one dessiatine of land for twenty-five roubles a year. He might not sell his produce except to the government, which paid fifty kopeks a pood for potatoes. His taxes amounted to forty-one roubles a year, of which eleven were for the horse. But this year, the land was taken away from him and he was told: "You earn quite enough to live on with your work as a carter. You don't need anything else."

"Then we got afraid," said the woman, "for we thought that if we stayed till next autumn, we should be told that the horse and cart belonged to the government. Besides, I had no more time to cook or sew or clean, for if I wanted a little calico for a dress I had to wait all day in a queue to get it. For bread I had to stand four or five hours outside the government shop. My children were taught at the school that their mother was an enemy against whom they must always be on the watch, so as we are of Persian nationality we decided to come back to Urmeya. On our permit it was written that we might take our wagon, our clothing and our household implements with one bed, one chair

and one table, but at the frontier they cut up our mattress and took off the wheels of our wagon to look for money. We heard that one man had taken the metal rims off his cart wheels, grooved the wood underneath and stuck into it two hundred gold roubles, before replacing the iron. The customs people had discovered the trick and since then you are lucky if they do not examine each spoke. We had only fifteen roubles with us and this they took. Now we are selling our clothing in order to live."

There is little hope that the thousands of Nestorian refugees will find work on the plain to which they had hoped to return in their old age, having made a modest fortune in post-war Russia, which they assured me offered considerable facilities for business and unlimited opportunity for agricultural development; "if only the government would leave us alone."

The chief product of Urmeya was and is raisins, which used to be dipped in boiling "lye," a solution of soda made from bleached wood-ashes, and exported in vast quantities to Russia, but the Soviet Government has put an embargo on the import of all luxuries, amongst which raisins are included. So the Nestorian villages are ruined and their only hope of feeding the south-bound fugitives, who are camped in shelters made of branches and bits of clothing wherever there is water, is in the new road rapidly growing across the Mesopotamian frontier towards Rowanduz. For it is hoped that Iraq and Europe will take the fruit prohibited in Russia.

At Urmeya I spent a night in one of the houses which had been cut in half in order to make room for the new main street. Consequently my room opened straight on to the highway and I had a view of the sleeping arrangements of a town distraught by the recent earthquake which had destroyed the neighbouring province of Selmas. Camp-beds were pitched all along the street and whole families were rolled in quilts as far as possible from the ruins made by modernization. My Armenian hostess told me that her family

had received no compensation for the loss of their yard which ensured privacy and comfort. On the contrary they were ordered to make a new pavement along the front of the house at a cost of three hundred tomans.

Afterwards, I moved to the American mission whose compound provided refuge for thousands of Nestorians during the absence of the Russian Army in the spring of 1915, and which has done so much for the health of the whole province. The women of Urmeya owe a special debt of gratitude to the American missionaries whose example and untiring labours have done much to ameliorate their lot. It is possible now for respectable women to walk about the town without being accompanied by servants and to pay visits to their friends unannounced. The rigid formality of the old life is breached at every point. Men and women are to be seen driving together in the local victorias. A rich Moslem woman manages her own property as well as a successful real estate business. Several such ladies unveiled, receive men in their own houses, though they continue to wear the chadour in the streets. Altogether there is much more freedom of movement among the townsfolk, who are chiefly Moslems of Turkish descent, though child marriage still exists, and an annual maternity gives rise to tragic cases of abortion.

The surrounding villages are principally Nestorian and the population is generally about a third of the pre-war figures. The women are apple-cheeked and sturdy like the Swiss peasants. The houses are built of stone. They consist of a "summer room" which is a walled court with a shelter on one side roofed with branches, and a "winter room" which is used as a general store with grain piled in the corners and clay water-bottles ranged against the walls. In the floor of each is sunk a vast convex oven hollowed out of the earth and closed with a metal lid. It is so large that fugitives have often found it a convenient hiding-place, but it narrows towards the mouth so that a low table covered with a carpet

can be placed right across it. Radiating round the warmth like the spokes of a wheel, with their feet, as it were, at the hub—under the kyursee—sleep the family in winter. In summer, under the shelter of branches, men, women and children lie in a row covered with quilts, under which they are completely naked. The only furniture in such houses besides coarse carpets and coverings, is the churn which looks like one of the jars belonging to the forty thieves. It is rocked gently back and forth to make butter, and somewhere near it is the convex pad, with a hand socket at the back, on which the sheets of bread are shaped before being slapped on to the rounded walls of the oven to bake above a wood fire. There are pots which can be lowered into the oven by means of four-foot metal hooks and strings of dried herbs from which medicines, philtres and sometimes charms against the evil eye are brewed. For in spite of their sturdy, self-sufficing independence and the Christianity to which they have adhered for sixteen centuries, superstition is as firmly rooted in the Nestorian character as the stalwart uncomplaining pride which no amount of misfortune has been able to break.

During the past, the comparatively prosperous population of the Urmeyan plain, which measures some hundred miles by twenty-five, suffered from the exactions of Moslem rulers. The province possesses a perfect climate so that, unlike desert Persia, it is a smiling land deep in flowers and grain, growing tobacco and regiments of sunflowers for their seeds, making molasses and cultivating a special plant for brooms. The continuously working mills used to be guarded by fortified towers which defied the Kurdish raider, but could not protect the farmer from the petty persecutions of Moslem landlords. Even to-day, with security capably enforced by Persian troops and police who are the only undiluted Iranian elements in a land of mixed origins, tongues and religions, a certain amount of distinction is made in favour of the Moslems. I remembet a young Persian officer, who belonged to

an old Islamic family, but who had married a Nestorian in spite of strong parental opposition, exclaiming: "Oh, when shall we be able to say 'Persian' instead of 'Moslem' and 'Christian.' Perhaps when the old people die off, the young will be more sensible." Meanwhile, in Azerbaijan, Armenian, Nestorian, Jew, Kurd and Turk, speak each their own language, except when they are entirely incomprehensible on the telephone, and are Persian only in their appreciation of better communications, increasing facilities for education, a slowly rising standard of hygiene and the blessed Pahlavi security.

CHAPTER XXIII

WAR ON MOUNT ARARAT. EARTHQUAKES IN SELMAS

FROM Urmeya, I turned North again along the shores of the lake of the same name which is the size of Palestine. A mountain pass divides the plain sacred to the Nestorians from the smaller one of Selmas, where the population of some twenty-five thousand is more evenly divided.

Selmas is the local name for that district of Azerbaijan lying between Lake Urmeya and the Turkish frontier, which was devastated—in places disintegrated—by earthquakes during the spring of 1930.

The lake is so extraordinary that it deserves some description. Eighty-four miles long and four thousand one hundred feet above sea level, its percentage of salt and iodine excels that of the Dead Sea, so that nothing can live in the brilliantly blue water except jellyfish. Its shores are blinding white, for they are coated with evil-smelling slime and caked with salt deposits. The average depth is only fifteen feet and when there is a wind a mist of salt blows along the surface, as if all the water were smoking. The Southern end is dotted with sixty islands, most of them uninhabited, and beyond the natural amphitheatres in which lie the plains of Urmeya and Selmas, rises the snow-covered peak of Mount Ararat, frontier of Russia, Turkey and Persia, and stronghold of the Kurds whose recent desperate resistance of the Kemalist troops recalls the defence of the Riff by Abd el Krim.

The Kurds are a people without history or literature. Their independence has been a thorn in the side of succeeding empires, Macedonian, Roman, Parthian, Byzantine, Tartar, Persian and Ottoman, whose flanks

have been persistently harassed by these tribal raiders. Sometimes they have enlisted as mercenaries and according to the historian Abulfeda, the great Saladin, opponent of Richard the Crusader, was a Kurd. The majority are Sunnis of the Shafei sect, but in the barrier ranges between Lake Van and Azerbaijan, some of the tribesmen belong to the curious Ali Illahi Tariq which believes in a thousand and one incarnations of the deity. Of these, the most important were Benjamin, Moses, Elias, David, Christ, Ali and his tutor Salman (a joint revelation), Imam Husayn and the Haft Tun (seven bodies). The latter were seven pirs or saints of early Islam, each of whom is worshipped in different parts of Kurdistan, but the better educated of the Ali Illahi believe that Benjamin, David and Ali were the most perfect manifestations of the godhead.

I found the Kurds generous and hospitable, courageous to the point of recklessness, grossly ignorant and stupid, a sullen, swaggering race of warriors and horsemen who considered that "grass grows quickly over blood shed in fair fight."

In the valleys cupped between the ranges, they had proved themselves good cultivators, but, ploughing or carting their produce, they were never parted from their rifles. In the mountain houses, the most convenient pegs were triggers, and when a man worked in the fields or a woman in one of the flat-roofed cabins, which seem to have no separate existence from the hillside, it was always with ears strained for the sound of a shot.

There are, perhaps, some six hundred thousand Kurds in Persia, divided into several different tribes, and as many across the artificial frontier which separates Azerbaijan from Turkey in Asia. A third section adds to the difficulties of Iraq Nationalists by repeated references to self-determination.

The boundary trouble between Persia and Turkey may be said to date from the early years of the sixteenth century when Sultan Selim the Grim, invading what is now the province of Azerbaijan, massacred forty

dependence to which they are as much entitled as any other homogeneous people.

Turkey chose the inauspicious moment when her neighbour was fully occupied to insist on a settlement of the frontier. Consequently, when the Shah visited Tabriz in September, 1929, he sent General Zafar-i-Dowleh on a mission to Igdir in the territory newly occupied by the Turks near Mount Ararat, and here the astute Iranian met the representatives of Mustafa Kemal. It was agreed between them that a boundary commission should meet in April, 1930, but a month before it was due the Kurds began plundering Turkish villages in the neighbourhood of Bayazid and Karaklis.

Though the authority of Angora was then, nominally, maintained by a military post at Van, the whole line from Mush, west of Lake Van, Sasson, Bitlis, Shadakh and Norduz to the Persian frontier had been, in effect, an independent Kurdish Province. To obviate this, it was essential for Turkey to extend her boundaries so that they should include the Eastern flank of Mount Ararat, for though she could depend on the support of Russia, Persian interests lay in co-operation with the Kurds. At the very moment when Turkey expected, if not a combined offensive against the insurgents on Mount Ararat, at least the complete closing of the frontier, so that the Kurds would be isolated on their mountain massif, the rebels or patriots (as I have said, the terms are synonymous in the East) were able to draw on Tabriz for supplies of money, rifles and ammunition.

In defence of Persia, it must be said that, with the exception of the Armenians, no people in the world have been more ruthlessly persecuted than the Ottoman Kurds.

From Azerbaijan, I was able to make an unauthorized excursion into Turkish Kurdistan and it happened that I reached the front shortly after the battle of June 21st (1930), when the forces of the Turkish commander, Soobhy Pasha, had been ambushed in the pass between what the local Kurds call the greater and lesser Mount

Ararat, and pending the arrival of reinforcements from Angora, forced to retire towards the plain, where they were engaged in pillaging and burning villages.

I doubt if there were, at that time, more than two thousand armed Kurds on Mount Ararat, but their numbers were continually reinforced by fellow Moslems, fugitive from Russia. It was stated by these that the Chekist General Baghiroff was co-operating with the Turks on their Northern frontier, where the welter of peaks and gorges dependent on Mount Ararat descend into Armenia. Rumour also had it that the Soviet had supplied the materials for a quantity of poison gas, which was being prepared by three German chemists at Bayazid.

At that moment the Kurds were jubilant, for they had successfully repulsed three successive attacks, though the troops used against them on each occasion were supposed to number five thousand. They had captured several Turkish guns and brought down two aeroplanes.

The commander of the Mount Ararat movement was Ehsam Noory Bey, once a colonel in the Turkish army, and later the right hand of Sheikh Sayid whose son was then being tried at Angora; but the hero of the region was a wild and gallant freebooter called Ibrahim Agha Huske Tello, instigator and leader of all the most daring raids, a ubiquitous and altogether amazing personage, capable, apparently, of fighting personally and simultaneously on three different fronts!

As Sultan el Atrash was to the Druses, so was Tello to the frontier Kurds. His fame had already passed into song, and encouraged by his shouted name, women would take up the rifles dropped by the wounded. Fighting side by side with their men, they seemed to enjoy the sport, for they returned to their villages, blood-stained and smiling with the boast, "We are not afraid of our enemies. When we see them coming, we laugh, for how can an army reach us here?"

It is true that their houses, stone-built and mud-faced out of the mountain side, are plastered on almost

NESTORIAN REFUGEES AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE AT SELMAS

NESTORIANS AT HOME IN URMEYA

invisible ledges, or within fissures that look like shadows. It seemed then that unless the whole mountain were blown up, it would be impossible to dislodge its gallant defenders, but the Turks are as good fighters as the Kurds, whom they outnumbered ten to one. They were backed by every device of modern warfare, including 'planes, tanks and heavy artillery. The weight of metal poured into the mountain during the subsequent weeks was an earnest of Turkey's determination to "finish with the accursed race."

The front spread from Ararat to Bitlis.

In Zilan, Shadakh and Norduz, the Kurdish tribes were fighting grimly, neither giving nor asking quarter, but in the plains, defenceless agriculturalists were massacred, and according to the Armenians who sympathized with the Kurds and on occasions aided them to the best of their ability, many were deliberately drowned in Lake Van. Tales of atrocity are bred in the mountains of Kurdistan. They grow with the wind and spread like a forest fire. Still, it must be confessed that there was, East of Van, considerable confirmation of the holocaust said to have been instituted by the Turkish troops.

Some eight hundred families, unable to withstand the Kemalist advance, crossed the boundary into Persia and added to the confusion on the plains already devastated by earthquakes, while the horrors on the Turkish side of the frontier were augmented early in July by the formation of bands of Kurdish terrorists. Their admitted objective was to strengthen the resistance of the nationalists between Erzerum and the Persian border, but their advent was generally a signal for the massacre of any Turkish peasants who had been foolish enough to linger near the front.

To counterbalance so much unnecessary cruelty, the heroism of some of the village leaders, such as the surviving sons of Kior Hussein Pasha in Zilan, Adel Bey in Moks and Abu Bekir Agha in Norduz, to say nothing of the warriors on Mount Ararat, can only be characterized as sublime, for, ignored by the whole

civilized world, isolated from their fellow Kurds and, towards the end, deprived of munitions and food, they fought doggedly and hopelessly for a freedom which was theirs long before they raided Xenophon and his retreating ten thousand, and which they maintained as an inalienable right. But from the beginning they were doomed. Like the Riff and like Jebel Druse, Mount Ararat succumbed to "the forces of civilization."

Meanwhile, the narrow plain of Selmas between the Kurdish mountains and the incredible lake where nothing can sink, last refuge of the homeless from Russia and Turkey, had the appearance of the salient at Ypres after a year's bombardment. Less than twenty miles away Soobhy Pasha's troops had occupied the Eastern slopes of Ararat, thus definitely infringing on the rights of Persian sovereignty and offering in excuse the presence of Kurdish emissaries in Tabriz and the organization which was undoubtedly occupied in gun-running across the frontier. But no threat of war could stir the lethargy in which the majority of the inhabitants were sunk. They had suffered too much from nature to fear any human aggression. Dilman, the capital of the province, had been completely destroyed and a hundred and twenty villages levelled to the ground. The population of Selmas used to be estimated at something like twenty-five thousand. Of these one thousand eight hundred were killed or disappeared in the first big earthquake on May 6th (1930), and just over two thousand two hundred were wounded. Three thousand beasts, sheep, goats and cattle, were buried among the ruins and a few days after the shock, while the majority of the dead were still unrecovered, the stench threatened to add disease to the horrors experienced by the unfortunate villagers.

The next generation in Selmas will probably be Persian, for the government is concentrating on this language in the schools and has forbidden the use of any other on the telephone, which adds greatly to the difficulty of doing business, but at present the plain is

MOSLEM REFUGEES WITH THE MUD SHELTERS THEY BUILT AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE AT DILMAN

a land of Babel. The Nestorians talk Syriac and probably understand no Persian. Armenians, Kurds and Jews all speak their own language, and the only general meeting-ground is the local Turkish, which is spoken by all the Moslems. At the present moment, each nationality has its own group of huts, sheds or mud tepees, from which the timbers rescued from the debris stick out like the bones of skeletons.

I was told by the inhabitants of Khosravar and Koinashaher that for the last year they had experienced small shocks, but the formidable one on May 6th, 1930, was only heralded by a prolonged shiver in the morning which destroyed a few old walls and killed fourteen people. Warned by this, the Colonel commanding the district moved his soldiers into camp, with the result that though the barracks were utterly destroyed a few hours later, he had no losses among his tents and could immediately render effective first aid.

A contingent of the Red Lion Society (the equivalent of our Red Cross) arrived from Tabriz within five hours of the morning tremor and were therefore on the spot when at eleven p.m. on the same night an earthquake unparalleled since those of 1820 and 1870 lifted the town of Dilman from its foundations and heaped its two thousand three hundred houses one on top of the other in an inextricable confusion of beams, plaster, window-frames, mud bricks, straw and earth. The shocks continued throughout the night and were felt sixty miles away in Urmeya, where, weeks later, people were still sleeping in camp-beds on either side of the new, wide streets which have been relentlessly driven through houses, courts and mosques, so that this town looks as if it also had suffered from an earthquake.

On May 7th the Shah sent his private physician, Dr. Amir Alam, by 'plane from Tabriz, and within twenty-four hours a large detachment of the Red Lion were camped round the scene of the disaster, but after the wounded had been treated and the serious cases removed to Tabriz, where the hospitals overflowed into the officers' Club, the great need was for spades.

Motor lorries stacked with several hundred shovels and picks were rushed from the nearest towns, and many families which had been buried alive were rescued in an unconscious condition.

Every doctor in the neighbourhood was ordered to proceed to Selmas, and this advance guard was followed by an army of motor transport laden with bread. For town and village stores were buried under masses of sun-baked masonry. Mills and ovens were destroyed, and worse still, the water-courses essential for the irrigation of ripening crops, were choked with rubble.

The main bridge on the road leading to Urmeya had buckled till it looked like a scenic railway. The road was split into fissures several feet deep. A hill used as a graveyard had burst open and yielded up its dead, whose bones now litter the surrounding fields. Such villages as Khosravar, where moderately prosperous Nestorian farmers had owned large mud-built houses, with granary and stables on the ground floor and living-rooms above, looked as if the skies had opened and rained heterogeneous building material upon an unprepared earth. When I crossed the plain it was almost impossible to believe that a town with ten or twelve thousand inhabitants had existed. The site of Dilman was a succession of rubble heaps, twenty and thirty feet high, with here and there a cluster of timbers sticking out of the rubbish like spillikens, or a window-frame hanging from a mass of loose bricks.

It seemed incredible that the heaps of mud and dust, not much raised above the surrounding earth, were once small Moslem villages. Koinashaher presented the strangest sight of all, for it had been levelled as if the township had been shaken in a pan and then dissolved in some appalling solution. Not one stone stood correctly upon another. The place had been kneaded by one convulsion after another until it had been reduced to the least common denominator of all Central Asia—mud!

During the week which followed the earthquake, the government had to distribute seventeen to twenty

kharwars of bread daily to a population too dazed to do anything but wander among the ruins, mourning its frightful losses.

One man buried to the armpits dug himself out, to find his whole family had perished in the strata on which he had been standing. Another lying under a kyursee (which has already been described) saw his three children killed around him without being able to help them.

A week later men and women still pointed to what had been their houses and explained: "In these ruins there are five dead and we cannot get to them," or, "Here there must be three whom we can't dig out," or, "Here a man was buried alive and we heard his groans and dug him out with our bare hands." Other pathetic experiences were related.

A woman told me how she had escaped because she was flung right out of the house, while her husband and five children died under a mass of debris which she was too weak to move. In another case, out of a whole family, only a grandmother of over seventy and a baby of three months were left alive. The cradle to which the child was strapped had turned and protected it from the falling beams. The old woman had no idea that the infant had escaped till, mourning the dead among heaps of mud and dust, she heard a stifled wail and was able to dig out the baby from almost under her feet.

Quantities of merchandise were still buried under the ruins, for a well-stocked bazaar was obliterated with its contents, human and commercial, under the walls and metal dome of a mosque which crashed on top of it, but the merchants who survived were still too depressed to start the Herculean task of digging. It would take the whole army of Persia and all its road-workers, they said, to disentangle what was once the town of Dilman. Still, much had been done. The water-courses had been cleared. Some of the grain had been rescued and the government had been able to decrease its dole of bread to an average of five

kharwars a day. The people had been provided with small sums of money, averaging £2 a head, to cover their immediate necessities and the majority had displayed considerable heroism in settling themselves and what remained of their families, together with such fragments of household possessions as they could save from the wreckage, in huts hastily constructed on the outskirts of town or village. The Nestorians and Armenians had built sheds, the walls of any sort of timber they could find, the window frames filled in with flattened petrol tins, the roofs of poles covered with sacking or reed mats with a layer of beaten mud on top. In these shelters there were no divisions and no front. The people were sleeping in them in rows, huddled together among whatever quilts or carpets remained to them, with the meagre relics of their furniture piled around them.

The Moslems had gone in for a still simpler form of architecture, resembling the tepees of Red Indians, only in this case the tents were made of branches, or roof timbers, leaning one against the other and plastered on the outside with mud mixed with chopped straw. The round holes which served as windows often had beautifully incised metal trays for shutters, and sometimes a pathetic little mud tent, five feet by three feet and barely four and a half feet high, had part of a noble front door with a vast padlock to close the opening.

In the whole of Selmas no one slept under a roof those nights and as the slight shocks still persisted, the population was kept in a continual state of terror lest it should lose the little it had saved.

The government, which proved itself equal to the emergency in every possible way, was already planning the construction of a new provincial capital, surrounded by new villages, and with the assistance of the best architects in Tehran, was experimenting with one-story, box-like types of houses, which, honeycombed together, are said to offer the maximum of resistance to shocks, but one of the tragedies of the plain was

that, in most cases, it was the young people who were killed. Consequently, labour was at a premium. The elders, warned by the morning tremor, slept in the yards or in the streets, while their sons and daughters, impatient of the cold and incredulous of the stories told by the oldest inhabitants, retreated into the houses when a rising storm should have warned them to remain outside.

race which regards raiding as the finest possible sport. Aziz Agha, headman of Busserini, through whose incredible gorge, hitherto unpenetrated except by an exiguous and very dangerous mule-track, the new road is already pushing its way, explained with naïve amazement, "It is strange. Before the coming of the British I could never come down from the mountain without an armed force. The village was deserted and the fields untilled. Now, I see men working among their crops with no rifles on their backs and the sight is curious."

But the Kurd is still unconquered among his rocks. He pays unwilling tribute to the Iraq Government, which he regards as alien and inferior because, barring the stalwart Assyrian Christian, he is the finest fighter on the Asiatic border, and equally unwilling homage to the British who defeated him on his own ground. In theory, he would like an independent Kurdistan, united as far as any tribal community can ever be, but there is no love lost between the leaders of the various clans situated on Persian, Turkish and Iraqi soil. A measure of civilization may come to them with the trade which will flow along the new road, but until their standard of living is raised by the opportunity to barter their agricultural produce, their hides, wool and felts for the European goods passing between Mosul and Azerbaijan, they will remain a threat to the peace of three countries. For the only merchandise in which at present they are interested is expanding bullets, and during the ten days I wandered South from Mount Ararat towards the road-camps in South-west Persia and Northern Iraq, the only pegs on which I could hang my discarded clothes at night were the triggers of rifles slung on mud walls, or the centre poles of tents.

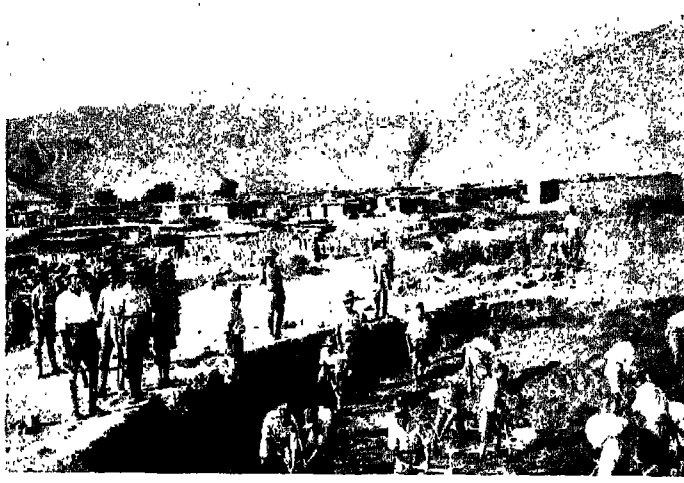
The Persian Colonel commanding at Urmeya had been kind enough to inform the sergeant in charge at Nagodeh of my imminent arrival. It happened that I was a fortnight late and it seems that time in modern Persia means considerably more than it did under the

old régime, for a soldier stationed outside the village to watch the only track by which anyone could approach, greeted me with approximately these words: "Here have I been sitting on this mound for fourteen days and three hours. It pleases me that you did not delay any further, or the saddles would have worn into the backs of the horses which have so long awaited you."

The influence of the new road begins at Nagodeh, from where Kurdish transport now crosses the barrier range in three or four marches. Here I hired a couple of stalwart mountain ponies with a guide attired in vast goat's hair garments, belted with twenty yards of sash, in which he stuck all the necessities of his existence: tobacco, a couple of murderous knives, an odd coil of rope, a very dirty handkerchief with some coins tied in one corner, and a supply of local bread. The Persian army supplied me with an excellent riding-horse and a charming companion in the person of Sergeant-Major Hussein Khan. Unfortunately we couldn't speak a word of each other's language, but both he and the two troopers who accompanied him were exceedingly efficient in dealing with the minor difficulties of the situation.

We started forth at three p.m. with the optimistic intention of reaching the frontier post of Khané, about thirty-two miles away, that night, but we'd reckoned without the baggage which strewed itself over the plain whenever the Charvadar (muleteer) urged his animals out of a walk. Consequently, when we reached Galvan, a small Kurdish village set on a hummock in the plain, the sun was setting and we were glad to accept the headman's hospitality. His house consisted of one large mud room, the further half raised some three feet as if it were a platform and protected from the animals and chickens, which huddled among a miscellany of vivid quilts below, by an eighteen-inch wall. This portion was carpeted and surrounded by rolls of well-stuffed bedding against which we leaned while we ate saucers of cherry jam and drank equally sweet tea. The walls were hung with rifles, embroidered

TROOPERS OF THE ASSYRIAN BATTALION, IRAQ LEVIES, AT DIANA



MAKING BRICKS AT DIANA (FIRST ASSYRIAN BATTALION IRAQ LEVIES)

saddle-cloths, and the ribbed brown felt waistcoats worn by the Turko-Persian Kurds. After a lengthy conversation conducted chiefly by signs, a huge tray of sheep's cheese, *mast* (a junket made of curdled buffalo-milk), onions, cucumbers and the sheet-bread which is thin as newspaper, was brought in and when the soldiers had withdrawn, it was followed by my host's wife. She was immensely ponderous, with neat black hair and a rolling gait. Her waves of flesh were immersed in yards and yards of spotted white cotton, and once she had sunk on to the floor she appeared incapable of movement.

Other women came in, strong-featured and sunburned. They wore red and black striped turbans set at a rakish angle, with a chin-strap fastened above each ear by a tasselled ornament. Their short velvet jackets, brilliant green or violet, were embroidered with gold and worn above a straight black robe, which in its turn was lost in unnumbered yards of striped cotton skirt, the whole being surmounted by a floppy red and white sheet which had no visible fastening.

It was very late when I was led through the dim mud streets, splashed with moonlight and thick with dust. Gone was modern Persia and the Pahlavi hat. On the flat roofs, a few mightily turbaned figures were engaged in the last of the day's five prayers. Goats were spread round the houses like a thick, dark carpet. Boys, perched on the backs of dust-grey water-buffalo, sang odd little songs to encourage their unwieldy steeds.

My camp-bed had been erected in a hermetically sealed hut, in which it was obvious that the Sergeant-Major, who evidently regarded me as a Beefeater holding the keys of the Jewel Tower, was also determined to sleep. My Persian was sufficient to acquire "a large basin," i.e. the family baking-tin, in which to wash, but quite inadequate to dislodge the self-appointed Cerberus. As soon as he saw me laid upon the camp-bed and already involved in warfare with a home-made mosquito net, he stretched himself on a straw mat across the door, placed his sword under his head and

his revolver at full cock beside him. I hoped he would not have a nightmare.

It was not a peaceful night. By twelve o'clock the vocal duel between the village dogs and the jackals who defied them was at operatic pitch. A dust storm scattered bits of the mud and thatched roof over our unprotected persons. At frequent intervals the troopers held what they imagined to be whispered conversation with the Sergeant-Major. Between whiles they sang in minor thirds. At four a.m. someone shook me and said it was after six.

However, it was a cool morning, and after more unleavened bread, flavoured this time with a bowl of sour milk mixed with chopped herbs, we started off across a band of hills glued as if for ornament along the edges of a plain. Desert Persia, burned a reddish brown and scarred with salt of the Kavir, was banished once for all. Here was grain for mile after scented mile and the barley, wheat and millet were interspersed with masses of single hollyhocks. There were splashes of petunia, blue and yellow painted across the downlands which were velveted with short, fine turf like the horns of a stag.

All travellers were armed, and some of the women carried a rifle on their shoulders and a baby slung below it. Monstrous wagons, mounted on solid wooden circles, creaked behind teams of buffaloes with large and splendid young men, huge-girthed and fair-haired, lying across their rifles, asleep, but always one strode watchfully in front.

Kurdish villages appeared like mud terraces, the roof of one hovel forming a platform in front of the door of another, so that seen from above, the hillsides looked as if they had been terraced for sowing. Among the crops, men worked with their striped, balloon-like trousers tucked into felt leggings and the six or eight feet sleeves of their white cotton garments turned up as cuffs and then tied above the elbow.

This time we left the baggage to look after itself and ambled at an excruciating pace, neither walk nor

KURDISH HORSEMEN

LOCAL TRANSPORT IN KURDISTAN

canter, to Khané at the foot of the frontier range, up which Persia is rapidly pushing her end of the new road. Here the gradients are easy. There are no rocks to blast, no gorges to manipulate, no river to bridge, and the tents of her engineers are climbing steadily towards the watershed. By the end of 1931, it is hoped to reach the frontier of Iraqi Kurdistan, and when this happens Persia will be able to congratulate herself on a success justly due to native enterprise and energy.

At Khané there is a small customs post like a clay band-box dropped in the middle of a plain. There is also a detachment of frontier guards under the Nayib Dedache Khan, who kindly offered me his mud hut, seven feet by four, but I elected to pitch my bed among the ankle-deep grass beside a stream clear and ice-cold from the mountains. From there I could watch an exceptionally interesting scene, for it happened that Hadji Garani Agha, Amir of the Ashahiri tribe, had just returned from the pilgrimage to Mecca and more than five hundred horsemen had assembled to kiss his hand, or his garments, as he crossed the frontier.

A crop of tents grew up like mushrooms. The plain was alive with horses, whose tails, swishing a continual protest against hordes of insects, were like wind-driven grass. As for the warriors, they were splendid beyond description and as the spines of a hedgehog so were the arms with which they bristled.

The great among them joined the Agha in a huge tent and their rifles were stacked outside. A row of large brass samovars provided relays of tea. Gaily-coloured pots, probably from Moscow or Kharkoff steamed on the top of metal funnels, and servants carrying glasses half-filled with sugar passed in and out under the flaps. The Agha's son, a boy of twelve, wore his gigantic width of trousers stuffed into cavalry boots, his fringed turban was four times the size of his head, and he told me with pride that there were forty yards of material in his intricately knotted sash. Among his companions, there were some overalls of lime-yellow cloth immensely wide in leg and blouse,

surmounted by wasp-striped waistcoats and turbans in which black and yellow predominated. Other tribesmen wore emerald velvet jackets and such an amount of sash that when they rode at full gallop from one tent to another or indulged in wild races, ending in a mounted wrestling match, a tug-of-war which was only decided when one competitor lost his seat, or a powder display in which rifles were fired with a careless abandon that ended in several being wounded, they looked like a couple of balloons surmounted by a life-belt, with a proportionately small torso emerging for just that amount of space between the chest and another gigantic balloon in the shape of a turban.

Darkness put an end to the racing, in which each vain-glorious chieftain "matched" his horse and so many tomans against another that he coveted. If he won, the rival mount was handed over to him. If he lost, his steed as well as the money with which he had backed its prowess went to his antagonist. The evening prayers were a gorgeous spectacle, when, after ablutions in the stream from which everyone simultaneously drank, the tribesmen ranged themselves behind the newly returned pilgrim and thundered their worship towards the Meccan Ka-aba, over whose exact position there had been considerable argument.

I had hardly arranged my inadequate defences against the plague of mosquitoes, when a storm arose and with the suddenness habitual to Central Asia, blew me head over heels into a crop of corn. My bed went with me, and we bowled merrily into a group of Kurds who had lingered over a starlit meal of bread, chopped onions and sour goat's milk. They arrested my progress, picked my pillow out of a bowl of "dogh" and kindly offered me a share of their tent. With gratitude I accepted, and as portions of my bedding had gone astray in the dust which belched out of the plain as if a funnel were on fire, I lay between quilts provided by my hosts and was devoured by every form of bug. Nevertheless, towards the dawn, I slept and was roused by what I imagined an earthquake. Actually, it was

KURDISH WOMEN AT GELLALA

an unknown Kurd vigorously shaking my shoulders and repeating: "Must I travel to Mosul alone? The mountains are dangerous, and you have soldiers with you. Wake them—it is not good to sleep so much—and we will ride together."

An hour later, we were climbing up the frontier slopes, watching the new road sketched above and below us. A horde of labourers, Persians and Assyrians, Turks, Kurds and Armenians, with a considerable number of Russian refugees and a few odd Turkoman, Indians and Levantines worked on its ever-growing tentacle, the indication of a great ideal which must develop into an international highway bearing the commerce and the civilization of peace into a mountainland which has lived only by war.

For twelve or fourteen miles between the frontier posts of Persia and Iraq, the aggressive peaks, streaked with snow and smooth as metal, offer insecure refuge to outlaws who own no nationality. This no man's land used to be a haunt of the redoubtable Simko who, during the war, murdered under his own roof the last Mar Shimun, head of the Nestorian Church. Having been outlawed by Iraq, Turkey and Persia, he raided the three frontiers in turn, until a few weeks after my uneventful passage, he was surprised and killed by a Persian patrol.

Between grey limestone and barren shale, we climbed slowly, driving the baggage in front of us in spite of the protests of the guide, whom we had mounted on a mule of noble appearance and vile temper. After four hours' ride we reached the summit and saw the flattened roofs of Rayat promising food and a change of horses, for our small Arab stallions, grass-fed, had done two fairly long marches and having worked themselves into unbridled frenzy at the approach of any rival, with accompanying plunges, bucks and whinneys, they were now feeling the heat.

The hospitable Effendi in charge of the Iraq Customs fed us on the best *mast* that I had yet tasted, and sent me down the pass with an escort of the Iraq

Mounted Police, large, fair, sunburned men, exceedingly smart and soldierly. Their horses were well groomed, their saddlery and equipment splendidly kept, and they looked like a British outpost, than which no higher compliment can be paid.

Within the next two years, the Government of Iraq will doubtless have completed the road which, with commendable foresight, it is making from Erbil in the plains East of Mosul to the Persian frontier, where it will join the new route to Azerbaijan. Seventy-five out of the projected hundred and sixteen miles have already been completed, though the surfacing is not yet finished. Innumerable difficulties have been surmounted, for the portion of the road already constructed passes through the Rowanduz gorge, where previously there wasn't even a camel track, and where walls of rock rise a sheer five hundred feet out of the rapids of a river which is a tributary of the greater Zab. During last summer, five hundred men were employed between Rowanduz and the Busserini Gorge, where the road halts forty-five miles from the frontier. The average labourer was paid one rupee a day, skilled drillers two rupees eight annas, and tradesmen up to four rupees. Already, five metal bridges had been thrown across a river which used only to be spanned by swaying structures of withes or branches, three feet wide, slung between protruding rocks sixty feet above the torrent.

The annual budget of Iraq is only six hundred lacs, yet realizing the importance of a highway which will bring her the trade of Western Persia and allow her to export her own and European goods straight into her neighbour's richest provinces, she has wisely authorized an expenditure of twenty-seven lacs of rupees on what will eventually be one of the main arteries of Central Asia. Ten and a half lacs have already been spent, and the Iraq Government is to be congratulated on a remarkable engineering feat, for Erbil, the Southern terminus of the new road, has an altitude of a thousand feet above sea-level, whereas the pass of Rayat rises in a series of precipitous limestone crags, showing the complete

TYPES OF KURDISH BEAUTY

range of oil-bearing strata, to five thousand five hundred feet. The maximum gradient of the road will be one in twenty, but the mule track down which I rode from Rayat on a blistering July day, with the mercury soaring over 107° F., showed a gradient of one in five. It revelled in sudden descents where the path was the width of a wrist-watch strap, sloping outwards so that it seemed as if no animal could possibly avoid slipping into the chasm below.

For four hours we rode into the blaze of the Westering sun. The animal I bestrode was an army horse. Without a martingale, it held its head on a level with my own. Whenever the track ceased to exist, it leaped forward in a series of bounds which covered considerable horizontal and little vertical space. The upcurved cantle of the army saddle came into violent contact with flesh already raw from Kurdish pommels. The rifle in its leather bucket flogged my heel whenever my mount skipped more vigorously than usual. The heat was refracted from igneous rocks, and even the scenery, as magnificent between the scrub oak fringing the stream and the mighty peaks, iron-grey or blinding white, as any out of the Himalayas, was insufficient to comfort me for the unending slither of a descent which prophesied at every moment a fall on to the boulders hundreds of feet below.

At last we turned aside and climbed the overthrust mass of rock, last spur of the Persian plateau, on which is plastered the village of Gellala. Each house looks down from a separate hillock on to the roof of its neighbour, and for this crag-guarded ravine, the sun sets in mid-summer shortly after five.

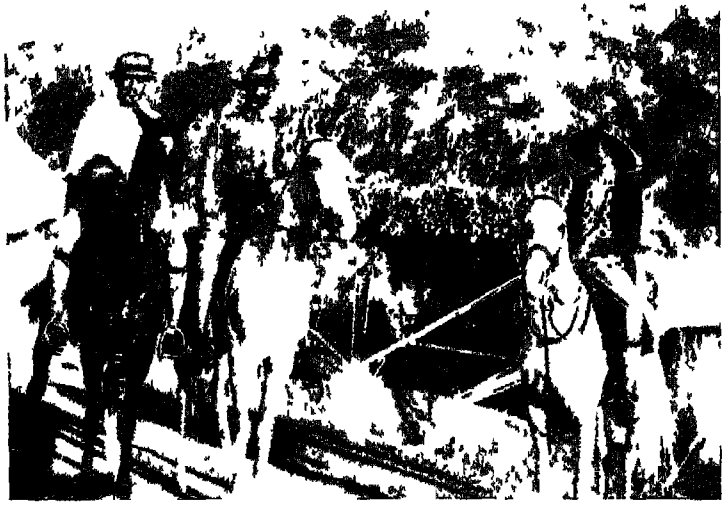
A little doubtfully, the clean-shaven Iraqi policeman suggested I might sleep in the Mudir's office. It was littered with cigarette ends and unsatisfied suppliants, each feeling that the only thing which mattered in the world was his own particular case. Large and squelchy tarantulas decorated the walls.

I protested, and the sound of a feminine voice roused the Mudir from his afternoon's rest. Satisfying his hos-

pitable instincts, he hurried me up a low-roofed, twisting stair, each step a separate mountain, through an apartment crowded with humanity and cooking-pots, and so into the usual Eastern room, mud-walled, with cucumber skins and ashes littering the earthen floor between the carpets, travelling chests and bundles of clothing which flanked the walls. But, to me at least, there was nothing usual about the three women smoking long native cigarettes in a corner by a tiny window. They were Kurds, like everyone else in the village, and sisters, but they came of a great family and they might have stepped out of the pages of a mediæval Missal. Dulac would have painted nothing else for the rest of his life. The most beautiful was the wife of the Mudir. She was tall and very pale, with thin, closely shut lips. The bones of her face were perfect and her eyes deep-set between the moulded cheek-bones and an exquisite brow, so that their darkness brooded mysteriously under a thicket of lashes. Her hair was the soft black, tip-tilted at the end, as all the best Bond Street bobs, and it fell to just the right length below her ears. She moved slowly, with a strange and supple dignity. Her hands were long and very fine, and there was the individuality of a Medici in the way she held a cigarette. But it was her clothes—the clothes of all three of them—that made me incoherent for the rest of the evening.

The Mudir's wife wore long tight-fitting trousers and I suspect a wadded petticoat to her ankles, but they were disguised by a flowing robe of semi-transparent apricot muslin powdered with mist-blue flowers. Over this was a royal garment, a long brocaded coat of sapphire and gold with tight sleeves. It was stiffened and lined with cramoisy, so that it stood out like the court dresses of the Renaissance. Round her shoulders was a scarf, a web of blue woven with gold, the ends crossed in front and tied behind her back. A gold chain bearing amulet cases of the same precious metal hung below her waist, and on her head the lady who should have been a mediæval queen, wore a cap sewn with golden coins, from which depended strings of coral, other

IN A KURDISH ROAD-CAMP



CAPTAIN MERRY AND A SERGEANT OF FIRST ASSYRIAN BATTALION
IRAQ LEVIES WITH THE AUTHOR AT DIANA CAMP

larger coins and small satin-covered sachets containing amulets. A gold chin-strap hung with tiny ornaments held the cap in place and round the edge of it was swathed yards and yards of fine black silk bordered with round tassels which stuck up or out anywise like expectant blackbirds. The ends of this scarf were tied behind the head and hung to the knees in a cascade of tassels, and the whole thing was held in place by two strings of gold and uncut stones which depended from the cap and were looped back over the scarf in a glittering, faintly tinkling fringe. This exquisite being made me lie down on the best carpet, fanned me as I gasped in the dry heat, refused me more than half a bucketful of water, fed me on rice steeped in sour milk and mixed with powdered herbs. Finally, when it was night, she led me up on to the roof, which was surrounded by a stockade of dried branches inadequately shielding it from the police post on a still higher ledge, where she bade me take my choice of the gaily coloured bedding. I chose a fuchsia-coloured quilt and a violet pillow, and then asked hopefully for water.

A chased silver ewer was brought and a trickle poured over my finger-tips. Firmly I seized the jug and removed the fretted cover from a bowl the size of a breakfast cup. At least a dozen women gathered round to see what I would do. Old rose, marigold yellow and the blue of midnight skies, their brocaded robes made a wall around me. Only their faces and their finger-tips were visible amidst the splendour of their garments. My courage failed me. Removing my riding boots, I crept unwashed beneath the quilts. My hostess sighed with relief and discarding her turban, established herself comfortably beside me.

I remembered another night, during which I had slept in the house of an Assyrian peasant in the Turko-Kurdish mountains. The same rows of quilts, shabbier but quite as thick, were laid side by side on a mud platform in the yard, where chickens, goats and a couple of dogs wandered at will. I chose the end place, and was afterwards much relieved, for men and women undressed

beneath the coverings, and having nonchalantly stacked their garments under their heads, went to sleep naked as they were born.

We started late next morning because sunrise did not reach the roofs of Gellala till the plains had baked for hours. Down we went, on foot where the track was no more than a cascade of rocks, on mules where it widened slightly between crags of shale. The Kurdish headman of Rowanduz, a tall, fair young man with turban and moustaches waving in the wind and a whole range of saddle-cloths, petunia and mustard yellow, rode with us on an unbroken three-year-old, because he was carrying money under his sash. We passed one village flattened on the edge of the river, so that its roofs looked like three terraces prepared for sowing. The inhabitants were all lying under trees round a samovar, from which they gave us tea. After this we climbed steadily till, in spite of the protests of the Assyrian police who had accompanied me from Gellala, I insisted on leaving the track to visit the Kurdish village of Dergela. Here we were most hospitably received by the headman, Mohamed Emin Beg. During the worst heat we sat round a tank sunk under an arbour of vines and drank sour goat's milk out of beautifully carved wooden ladles with wide handles, thin as paper, and bowls four inches deep.

We learned that eighty Assyrian families, fugitives from Russia, had passed through Azerbaijan and crossed the Persian frontier, but had been refused admittance into Iraq, so that, without food or shelter, they were now stranded in the bleak no man's land near the Khanishu Pass. Such treatment of a people who were our allies during the Great War and who, after giving up their homes and lands in the mountains near Julamerk in the extreme South-Eastern corner of Turkish Kurdistan, in order to fight on our side against the invaders of Persia, asked nothing at the Peace Conference except that their old territory should be included in a British protectorate, reflects little credit on our own authorities. It is also exceedingly short-sighted policy on the part of the Baghdad Government, for it would be greatly to their advantage to

THE ONLY BRIDGE ACROSS THE UPPER ROWANDUZ GORGE WHEN THE NEW ROAD ARRIVES, A STEEL SPAN WILL TAKE ITS PLACE

A COMPLETED SECTION OF THE NEW ROAD WHICH IS TO CROSS THE 5,000 FT PASSES OF KURDISTAN

CHALDEAN WOMEN AT DIANA

settle numbers of Assyrian Christians along the turbulent Kurdish frontier.

Under the Turks, the Kurdish mountaineers paid, in theory, the equivalent of one anna per head of sheep or cattle. In practice it was rarely collected. Since the inception of an Arab Iraq, their taxes have been increased six-fold, and with the aid of British officials, backed by the Air Force and by the Assyrian Levies, the only native troops capable of standing up to the Kurds during Sheikh Mahmoud's rebellion of 1923, they have been regularly collected.

Since the British inspectors from the Ministry of the Interior have been removed from this area, the Kurds complain of the exactions of Iraqi officials, who are biased in favour of their Arab dependents, and in accordance with a tradition which it will take generations of training to eradicate, prepared to enrich themselves inordinately during their terms of office.

If the Air Force is removed from Mosul, it is easy to prophesy that no more Kurdish taxes will be paid. The Iraq army would have no chance of coping with the mountaineers on their own ground unless backed by the whole-hearted support of the Christian minorities, all of whom, Armenians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Baptists, should be encouraged to form a settled barrier between the Arabs of the Mesopotamian plains and their hereditary enemies in the passes of Kurdistan.

After leaving Dergela, four hours' ride along the Rowanduz river, sometimes a thousand feet above it, sometimes level with its rapids, brought us to the scene of road-making. Before fording a gorge where drills had already been at work, we saw the line of the road scarred across the opposite cliffs. Part of a bridge was suspended in mid-air and on the end of it, a man sat casually regarding eternity. Air compressors were driving the twenty-foot tubes filled with gelignite into overhanging crags and the roar of blasting shook the pass. But the noise stopped with the sunset and when we reached the coolie camp at Jinjaan, a hundred fires twinkled in front of the tents. Every kind of cook-

ing pot steamed with the evening meal. All sorts and conditions of men were strewn in various stages of undress amidst bright-coloured bedding. In the semi-darkness, the scene resembled an ancient colour-print of a shipwreck, for the men were stripped like castaways and they were of all types. Momentarily exhausted, they had flung themselves down amidst what might well be salvage. One, flat on his back, wore dungarees and a felt hat. Beside him was a dervish in scarlet loin-cloth and turban. Here a fair-haired youth, sunburned so that his skin looked darker than his khaki shirt, pillowed his head on an outflung arm, while his companion, with shaven bullet head and a hirsute torso, revealed by his torn Russian blouse, stirred the rations in an Australian "billy." There a Persian tribesman with black, curling beard shared a quilt with a red-headed lout from the coast. In all tongues they greeted us, their god the road and their only interest, "How far has it gone on the other side of the frontier?"

An hour later, we reached the headquarters of the first Assyrian Battalion of the Iraq Levies, the frontier post of three peoples, where the British flag flies over a sentry-box that looks as if it had come out of Noah's Ark. Here, since the formation of this extremely efficient Christian force, which keeps peace on a Moslem border, the village of Diana has grown up with a population of three or four hundred Nestorian families all engaged in agriculture. Out of the raw material represented by exiled mountaineers, part of that tragic exodus of 1917 which left twenty-five thousand dead among the passes of Azerbaijan, and which, encumbered with women and children, harried by Persian and Turk, fought its way South to the refugee camps of the Tigris, have been created troops of which Iraq has every reason to be proud.

The tents which cluster under the crumpled Kurdish hills above the gorge of Rowanduz, with its five openings sprawled among the cliffs like the tentacles of an octopus, are to be replaced by hutments made of mud bricks. On this work, a whole company was apparently engaged and these stalwart soldiers, smart as any British unit, with

A BRIDGE FOR THE ROWANDUZ GORGE

AIR COMPRESSORS FOR BLASTING THE ROCK

THE ROAD PROGRESSES

THE NEW ROAD THROUGH KURDISTAN

scarlet ospreys in their khaki felts, were turning out sun-baked bricks at a pace which would disturb the average Trade Union labourer. The neatness of their lines was so insistent that I thought of the villages on the Urmeyan plain or in the highlands of Julamerk, from which the Assyrians came. From a distance the orderliness of the camp was that of a child's playthings neatly arranged in the wilderness. And in the intervals of patrolling an armed frontier, the N.C.O.s attended elementary classes held by their priest in a school which they have built themselves. But the childishness of Diana ends with the primers and with the Noah's Ark aspect of the camp. Westwards the plains are scarred and cracked by a temperature of 112° to 125° F. The surrounding mountains are a chaos of rocks, the highest ranges seamed with glaciers. They shelter the lawlessness and the treachery of the Kurd, for whom the Arab villager is a natural prey. If justification be needed for British colonization, alternately ridiculed and maligned since every inchoate collection of tribes has been united, spasmodically and uneasily, by the will-o'-the-wisp of self-determination, it may be found in such places as Diana, where the work of the individual Englishman means the security of a frontier.

Beyond Diana the new road runs through a gorge which was the limit of the Russian advance in 1915, and thereafter climbs successive ridges till it fords the Greater Zab and passes into the plain of Mosul with Nineveh as its goal. Along it, or within range of it, are settled most of the Minorities which engage the attention of Leagues and Conferences. Here are Mandaeans and Manichaeans, Sabæans who call themselves Christians of St. John, the devil-worshipping Yezidis and a dozen sects of Protestants and Catholics, not to mention the survivors of the ancient cults of the Moon and the Fish, Zoroastrians, Chaldeans and Nestorians.

When I came down the road in July, the conditions of the Anglo-Iraq treaty had just been published in the local papers, and at every village between Erbil and Jebel Sinjar, where the heroic rais of the Yezidis protected three

thousand Armenian fugitives during the war, I was asked: "What guarantee of safety have we if the British leave Iraq?"

Merchants and cultivators were already considering a premature emigration into Syria, so it would appear that the first duty of independent Iraq must be the reassurance of the Christian and other Minorities on whom depends the stability and to a large extent the commercial prosperity of the North.

The test of any civilization is its treatment of minorities, racial, religious and political. If the Iraq of the future is to be a stabilizing factor in the region which has always been a bridge between East and West, she must conquer what appears to be the natural impulse of all new states to ignore or repress the voices of minorities.

The road through Kurdistan will be an important addition to the trade arteries of Arabia and Asia, but its value will be lost unless it runs through peaceful country whose tradesmen and agriculturalists, whatever their origin or creed, have full confidence in the government, from whom as law-abiding subjects they are entitled to the fullest possible consideration.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DEVIL-WORSHIPPERS OF KURDISTAN

BETWEEN the Persian plateau and the Syrian desert minority problems are as insistent as the spines on a hedgehog. Within the same geographical borders there are Armenians fugitive from an intolerant and fiercely chauvinistic Turkey and Yezidis pledged to worship the devil for four thousand years. There are Nestorians and the affiliated sect of Chaldeans. There are monophysite hermits living in caves among the rocks; Magians who worship the eternal fire; Manichaeans whose founder attempted in the third century to blend the doctrines of Christ and Zoroaster; Sabæans who are baptized once a week and who venerate running water together with the Mandaeans, whose gnosticism is probably derived from Babylon, and who, as "Christians of St. John," are entitled to the toleration accorded by Moslems to "People of the Book." There are also a few isolated Samaritans, as well as the last of the moon-worshippers who once lived at Charran, holy city of the moon-deity Sin, and some who still reverence the fish as the symbol of creation, with Jonah as their prophet and a vast legendary monster—possibly the whale—as the arch ruler of the cosmic hierarchy.

It is a region of conflicting faiths and tongues, where Turk, Kurd and Arab, Assyrian, Armenian and Jew all speak their own language, while each religion has a dialect as unintelligible to its neighbours as the ritual which it has inherited from the days of Prester John. Most interesting, perhaps, is the creed of the Yezidis, who believe that Christ will rule the world only when the devil's course is run. In Jebel Sinjar, on the borderline between Iraq and Syria, and in a narrow Kurdish valley near Ain Sefni, there live the last of these satan-

worshippers, who once numbered a quarter of a million. Now there are perhaps sixty thousand of them, a mild and tolerant people, of Kurdish stock and speech, who call themselves "Dasnayi," but who are accused by hostile Shias of being the descendants of Yezid ibn Moawiya, the murderer of Imam Husayn.

It is more probable that the term Yezidi is derived from Yezdan, the Persian for Spiritual Omnipotence, for the cult of Satan is blended with the metaphysical philosophy beloved of eighteenth-century Iranians, and it is from Western Persia, birth-place of Zoroaster, that the Yezidis have acquired their adoration of the sun.

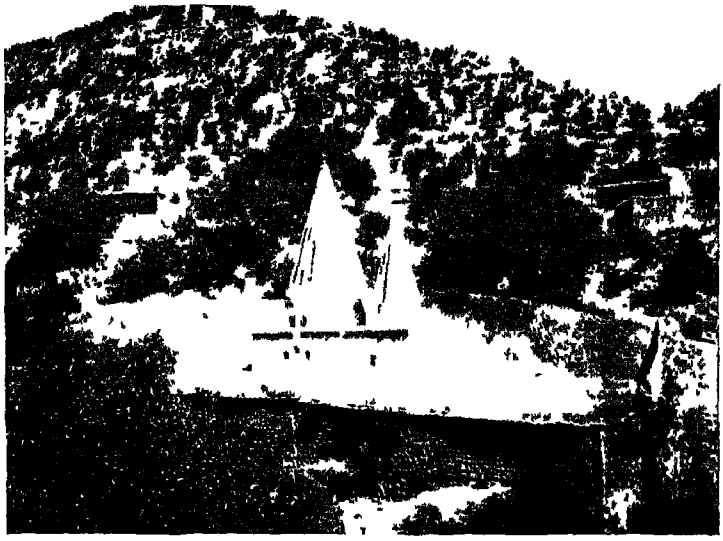
The Mecca of this peculiar sect, whose tolerance extends to all forms of religion, since they acknowledge the divine inspiration of Moses, Melek Isa (Christ), Mani, founder of the Manichaeans, Mohamed, John the Baptist and the Imam Mahdi, is at Sheik Adi. Thither I went to visit the Mir, temporal and spiritual ruler of a most obedient flock.

The shrine is built on a ledge, half-buried among giant mulberry trees, in a ravine which breaks away from the main valley. Rice fields, walled with the flannelette pink of oleanders, lie between sharp grey boulders. Blossom coats the hillside, and breaks into foam wherever the stream lingers. The ravine is holy ground, visited twice yearly by thousands of pilgrims intent on the adoration of Satan in the form of Melek Taus, the Peacock King.

Among the early Christians the peacock was an emblem of immortality. Tammuz, derived possibly from Taus, was a name for the beauty of Adonis, and in Persia it is applied to every ancient monument from the Tomb of Cyrus to fire altars once sacred to Baal. At Sheik Adi a small bronze image of the sacred bird is kept in a shrouded chest, while six others make the round of the Yezidi villages to stimulate piety and charity.

As the Cross to the Christians, as fire to the followers of Zoroaster, or the black stone in the Ka-aba at Mecca to the devout Moslem, so is the peacock to the Yezidi. It is the symbol of Satan, who must be propitiated because the Lord of All has given the earth into his hands for

A YEZIDI FAQIR WITH THE SACRED OIL
AT SHEIK ADI



THE SHRINE OF THE DEVIL-WORSHIPPERS AT SHEIK ADI

a period which has still four thousand years to run. The Yezidis acknowledge the two principles of good and evil, but the former needs no life-service, for it will exist throughout eternity in the person of a God (possibly Christ) who will reassume control of the earth when the devil's sway is finished. Into the Yezidi creed have crept tenets from the Talmud, the Bible and the Koran, while their pantheism includes the sacrifice of oxen to the sun, the worship of nature, so that it is a sin to cut any trees or to kill bird, insect or animal within the sacred valley, and the adoration of sunset and sunrise, so that a labourer will stop to kiss the ground where the first or last ray rests. From the Zoroastrians, the Yezidis have inherited their veneration of the sacred flame and from a still older cult their superstitions concerning the stones set apart as sacred. For the student, their faith is tinctured with Essenic philosophy, yet they pray in Arabic and use some of the formulas originated by Mohamed.

Like the Christians, they baptize; like the Moslems they circumcise; and like the Abyssinian Copts they practise a painful form of clitoridectomy. They eschew the colour blue in imitation of the Mandaeans, to whom it is holy as the water it represents. With the Jews, they refrain from eating those animals which neither chew the cud nor part the hoof, but their forbidden foods also include the cock, on account of its resemblance to their sacred emblem, the gazelle, because its soft eyes are like those of Sheikh Adi, founder and Prophet of the sect, the fish possibly as a compliment to Jonah, and various vegetables which might form the staple food of pea fowl. With the rare worshippers of the moon and the fish, they celebrate a lunar month and a tidal calendar.

The Yezidis have three holy books, the Black Book (Kitab el Eswed), the Book of Revelation, and the Kitab al Jalweh, which is a proclamation of allegiance to Satan, beginning with his proud assertion: "I was, I am, and I shall be unto the end of time, ruling over all creatures and ordering the affairs and actions of those who are under my dominion."

The Black Book concerns the origin of all creation, and especially of the Yezidis, who, according to their own legend, are descended from Adam and a mysterious dark lady brought to him by the devil. Such was the jealousy of Eve that no connexion could take place between the two, but out of their sweat, buried in two pots in the earth, a boy and a girl were created. From these sprang the Yezidis, for whom it is a capital offence to intermarry with any other creed, and who call no man "my brother" outside their own sect, but speak of him as "my friend" for he is not of the same inhuman seed.

According to Islam, the devil-worshippers are not among the "People of the Book" whose existence must be tolerated by order of the Koran. Consequently, since the days of Tamerlane, who watched the destruction of what is now Angora at the portals of the West, the Yezidis have been persecuted by neighbours who regard their faith as blasphemy. Turks and Kurds in turn have attacked and decimated a sturdy peasant race which asks no more than to be left alone to cultivate its crops. Throughout the centuries, the Yezidis have died as martyrs for a faith which knows no renegades, yet they expect no similar sacrifice from other religions. They are a generous people, who give hospitality and succour to all who take refuge with them. When, during the Great War, Hormoshero, rais of Jebel Sinjar, received the Ottoman ultimatum, which began with an offer of five pounds a head for the three thousand Armenians who had fled into Yezidi territory, the worshipper of Satan read no further. "Tear the letter into a thousand pieces," he said, "for to burn it would be to pollute the fire which we hold sacred."

The Yezidis are almost entirely illiterate, for education is forbidden by their law, except to the seven grades of the priestly hierarchy. I was told that among them all, there was only one woman who could read or write. Wives are purchased for anything up to two hundred pounds, often on the instalment principle. The bridegroom agrees to pay his father-in-law so much a month in money, grain, or labour, until he has earned the girl,

who is handed over to him as soon as the agreement is made, for the word of one Yezidi to another is inviolate as the law of the Medes and Persians. When she is brought to his house, a sheep or a hen is killed and blood sprinkled on the threshold, over which bride and groom must step without touching it. Every male Yezidi is affiliated to some sheikh. It is the latter's duty to bless his spiritual brother on his wedding day, and to bury him with his own hands when he dies, after which he receives a gift of the dead man's clothes, and for twelve months, the food which the departed would have eaten is placed daily upon the Sheikh's doorstep.

Among the Yezidis there is no divorce, but a man may have any number of wives. I asked the Mir, who is twenty-seven and has been married five times, how this answered in the villages where the mud houses are small and cramped. "With you, women have much power," he said, "so one wife is more than enough, but with us, where no woman has any power at all, it does not matter. They do not count." At the moment he must have forgotten his mother, an exceedingly strong-minded dame who rules her gentle son, and through him the whole Yezidi clan.

With regard to education, he vouchsafed that it must come in time, like the other evils of civilization, but when the British Government opened a school in Jebel Sinjar, it happened that four of the pupils were promptly drowned in a flood, and this was naturally accepted as an omen that the Peacock King disapproved of education. The matter is further complicated by the fact that no Yezidi will use any word rhyming with "shaitan," the Arab term of opprobrium for the devil, nor any beginning with sh, such as "shatt," the common Iraquian for a river, so the whole vocabulary would have to be revised.

When I visited Sheik Adi, its delightful stone-built courts, shaded with huge trees, were thronged with pilgrims. Horses, mules and donkeys were tethered in the outer yards, their saddle-cloths and fringed bridles almost as brilliant as the striped waistcoats, sashes and vast trousers of the peasants, who, with their black,

curling hair and beards, looked like slenderer editions of the bull-men sculptured on Assyrian pylons.

The origin of Sheik Adi is mysterious, for the Yezidi prophet was apparently two men, one a Moslem Sufi of the twelfth century and the other a Kurdish husbandman who lived a hundred years later. The former was a scion of the Omeyad dynasty and the latter the steward of a Nestorian monastery, who, with the aid of his two sons and the kinsmen of their Mongol wives, turned out the monks and made them into shepherds and farmers; the lay-brothers, in fact, of a new cult which he started in the once Christian church. Both origins are blended in the Yezidi faith, and the Sheikh Adi, venerated by fifty thousand devil-worshippers and buried in the Holy of Holies, where the kisses of the faithful have almost worn away the drapery which covers his tomb, is at once the royal mystic and the servant of the earth.

The Mir himself took me round the sacred enclosures. He is tall and slight, with immense brown eyes full of a sorrow which may emanate from the tragic history of his house, for the office is not strictly hereditary. The High Priest of the Yezidis is selected from among the adult males of the family which owns Ba Idris, a feudal castle set on a rock overshadowing the surrounding village, and so far, few Mirs have died a natural death.

In life, the best lands are given them. The most beautiful women are offered as their wives, and Kurdish beauty is notable throughout the Middle East. They receive a seventh of all crops and herds, in return for which they must maintain the shrine and feed all pilgrims who visit it, but the latter always leave some coin on the sacred threshold, across which they step with the utmost care not to touch it, either with a careless foot or with the hem of their garments.

Beside the carved and pillared door of Sheik Adi is chiselled a life-sized snake, blackened with oil and charcoal, and below is the stone on which the founder of the faith used to sit and meditate. Consequently, it is now too holy for anyone to touch. Legend has it that while the Sufi—or was it the Steward?—sat there

THE DOOR OF THE YEZIDI SHRINE AT SHEIK ADI THE MIR, HIGH PRIEST OF THE DEVIL-WORSHIPPERS, ON EXTREME RIGHT

one day, a particularly venomous snake crawled out of its hole intent on destruction. But the Saint spoke to him with so much wisdom that the reptile was converted, and instituted itself guardian of the holy man, with the result that when it died, simultaneously with its adopted teacher, his disciples commemorated its service on the wall of the shrine which was shortly to become the Mecca of a Satanic cult. Through this door I had to walk barefoot into a stone-built hall divided into twin naves, the vaulted roofs supported by a central row of columns. In each arch was suspended a large clay saucer curved into a spout in which lay a piece of home-spun wick. The oil used in these primitive lamps is purified till it burns without any smoke at all, and it is the duty of the servants of the shrine to maintain the flames night and day. At the end of the southern nave is a spring of ice-cold water, which the Yezidis believe is miraculously drawn from the Zem-Zem well at Mecca. This is the spring which, according to legend, gushed from the desert to save the life of Hagar and her son Ishmael, who afterwards married a daughter of the Qoreish, Kings of Mecca, and was therefore the ancestor of the Prophet Mohamed and of the Sherifian family, which has provided the rulers of Iraq and Trans-Jordan.

The Holy of Holies consists of another vaulted chamber, whose threshold must not be touched except by the coins or lips of the faithful, wherein is the wooden sarcophagus of the mysterious Adi. Beyond this again is the storehouse where the sacred oil is kept in vast blackened jars reminiscent of the Arabian Nights.

The shrine is served by seven orders of a religious hierarchy, of which the Mir is the highest. Under him are the sheikhs, or priests; the "pirs," who are preachers and often hermits; the "quchaqs," musicians who play the cymbals and sing at the festivals in honour of the sun or of the Peacock King and at other pantheistic rites; the "faqirs," who dance till blood and foam streak their chests; and the "qawals," who prepare the dead for burial and chant their litanies. The faqirs wear black shirts and turbans and white cotton trousers, which was

supposed to be the dress of the Kurdish Sheikh Adi. On ceremonial occasions the Mir is entirely robed in black, but when I saw him he wore a red and white kufiya over an exiguous black net skull-cap. He objected to being photographed in the former, because he imagined the red would appear blue in a print.

The beauty of Sheik Adi is in its surroundings, for the shrine is surmounted by two fluted white cones, which gleam through a thicket of dark leaved trees like the tusks of an elephant in the jungle. On either side of the ravine, cones of the same ivory white have been raised in honour of tutelary deities, the largest being devoted to the sun. Nearly always there is a sacred tree walled into the temple compounds, and far down the main valley, between the rice and the oleanders, there are conical stones hung with egg-shells to keep evil spirits from the crops.

The last fluted "pir," the tomb of some Yezidi saint, stands above Ain Sefni. After that there is the vast Plain of Mosul; and Nineveh, a capital of the old world overpowered by the growing city which is destined, with the completion of the railway into Syria and the road into Azerbaijan, to be a distributing centre for the products of the West.

Mosul, immersed in talk, so that from each crowded café emanated waves of agitated speculation concerning the effect of the new treaty, with the usual undercurrents of oil and nationalism, was, for me, the end of a seven thousand mile journey by every form of transport, animal and mechanical, which had begun many months ago at Angora. Setting forth once more towards the capital of Turkey, but approaching it from the East instead of the West, I saw it as a gateway to those unsettled lands where civilization is still an imposition and progress synonymous with conflict.

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